

## Kant's World Creating Ghost in the Machine:

### The Implications of Kant's Discovery of Transcendental Self-Consciousness

#### Preamble Outline

I. Four views of empiricism or the primacy of experience in knowledge, which underpin Kant's position(s) in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

i. All factual (synthetic) knowledge is *contingent*

Russell (*Human Knowledge its Scope and Limits* - HK hereafter) accepts this totally, with some minor exceptions.

ii. All factual knowledge is both *empirical* ie based in subjective experience, *and* contingent. AJ Ayer as a phenomenalist accepts this, but Russell (of HK) is *not any longer* an empiricist in this sense. Russell argues that my belief the world existed before I was born is not any more tenable or logical than the belief that matter exists and may exist that no one whatsoever has any experience of, and so that the only consistent 'total empiricism' position is 'solipsism of the present moment'. Because Russell believes in the primacy of contingency, this is his own ultimate position, though he also believes no one can practically hold to this. When Kant repudiates Berkeleyan Idealism, this is what he is really repudiating.

iii. Now Kant argues for an *a priori empiricism*. His implicit ground, with which Russell agrees, is that general rules cannot be inferred from purely contingent events. Therefore if experience had to conform to or be derived from contingent objects, scepticism would be resurrected once more. *Therefore Kant's is an empiricism of the A Priori. He completely divorces principle i. from principle ii. :*

'If intuition must conform to the constitution of the objects, I do not see how we could know anything of the latter *a priori*; but if the object (as object of the senses) must conform to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, I have no difficulty in conceiving such a possibility. Since I cannot rest in these intuitions if they are to become known, but must relate them as representations to something as their object, and determine this latter through them, either I must assume that the *concepts*, by means of which I obtain this determination, conform to the object, or else I assume that the objects, or what is the same thing, that the *experience* in which alone, as given objects, they can be known, conform to the concepts. In the former case, I am again in the same perplexity as to how I can know anything *a priori* in regard to the objects. In the latter case the outlook is more hopeful. For experience is itself a species of knowledge which involves [23] understanding; and understanding has rules which I must presuppose as being in me prior to objects being given to me, and therefore as being *a priori*. They find expression in *a priori* concepts to which all objects of experience necessarily conform, and with which they must agree. As regards objects which are thought solely through reason, and indeed as necessary, but which can never -- at least not in the manner in which reason thinks them -- be given in experience, the attempts at thinking them (for they must admit of being thought) will furnish an excellent touchstone of what we are adopting as our new method of thought, namely, that we can know *a priori* of things only what we ourselves put into them.'

iv. The negation of both principles, on grounds of full consistency, is full-blooded anti-empiricism, ontological anti-empiricism. This is rare today because both principles draw one or other of modern philosophers, nearly all of us. Brand Blanshard (e.g., *Reason and Analysis*), and JN Findlay's later Platonic philosophising would be instances. And this is because, whilst our reason suggests otherwise, our *imaginings* are incurably grounded in the two principles (unless we are mystics and even some then!), even with higher level elaborations. In other words, we know but we cannot understand *how and what* we know. GE Moore is nearest to *this* position. W Sellars in *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian themes* comes near to a scientific version of this position. We shall come back to all this.

II. In practice there are many Kantian variations. Strawson (*Bounds of Sense*, BS hereafter) offers us a commonsense Aristotelean Kant and in the process eliminates Kant's profound emphasis on time. Heidegger in his book *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (KPM) tackles the relation to time and its impact on the movement from Kant's First Edition of the Critique to the Second. Heidegger is near to an ontological anti-empiricism. We shall consider further variations in what follows.

Against Kant: Nietzsche, DH Lawrence, and Ayn Rand on Kant

Pro Kant: Whitehead on Kant

'We come now to Kant, the great philosopher who first, fully and explicitly, introduced into philosophy the conception of an act of experience as a constructive functioning, transforming subjectivity into objectivity or objectivity into subjectivity; the order is immaterial in comparison to the general idea.'

Nietzsche: Para 54 from *Gay Science* (apotheosis of an phenomenalist empiricist sceptical Kant):

'*The Consciousness of Appearance* - How wonderfully and novelly, and at the same time how awfully and ironically, do I feel myself situated with respect to collective existence, with my knowledge ! I have discovered for myself that the old humanity and animality, yea, the collective primeval age, and the past of all sentient being, continues to meditate, love, hate, and reason in me, - I have suddenly awoke in the midst of this dream, but merely to the consciousness that I just dream, and that I must dream on in order not to perish; just as the sleep-walker must dream on in order not to tumble down. What is it that is now " appearance " to me ! Verily, not the antithesis of any kind of essence, - what knowledge can I assert of any kind of essence whatsoever, except merely the predicates of its appearance! Verily not a dead mask which one could put upon an unknown X, and which to be sure one could also remove! Appearance is for me the operating and living thing itself; which goes so far in its self-mockery as to make me feel that here there is appearance, and Will o' the Wisp, and spirit-dance, and nothing more,-that among all these dreamers, I also, the "thinker," dance my dance, that the thinker is a means of prolonging further the terrestrial dance, and in so far is one of the masters of ceremony of existence, and that the sublime consistency and connectedness of all branches of knowledge is perhaps, and will perhaps, be the best means for •maintaining the universality of the dreaming, the

complete, mutual understandability of all those dreamers, and thereby the duration of the dream.’

Ship illustration from 2nd Analogy of Experience

‘Let us now proceed to our problem. That something happens, *i.e.* that something, or some state which did not previously [221] exist, comes to be, cannot be perceived unless it is preceded by an appearance which does not contain in itself this state. For an event which should follow upon an empty time, that is, a coming to be preceded by no state of things, is as little capable of being apprehended as empty time itself. Every apprehension of an event is therefore a perception that follows upon another perception. But since, as I have above illustrated by reference to the appearance of a house, this likewise happens in all synthesis of apprehension, the apprehension of an event is not yet thereby distinguished from other apprehensions. But, as I also note, in an appearance which contains a happening (the preceding state of the perception we may entitle A, and the succeeding B) B can be apprehended only as following upon A; the perception A cannot follow upon B but only precede it. For instance, I see a ship move down stream. My perception of its lower position follows upon the perception of its position higher up in the stream, and it is impossible that in the apprehension of this appearance the ship should first be perceived lower down in the stream and afterwards higher up. The order in which the perceptions succeed one another in apprehension is in this instance determined, and to this order apprehension is bound down. In the previous example of a house my perceptions could begin with the apprehension of the roof and end with the basement, or could begin from below and end above; and I could similarly apprehend the manifold of the empirical intuition either from right to left or from left to right. In the series of these perceptions there was thus no determinate order specifying at what point I must begin in order to connect the manifold empirically. But in the perception of an event there is always a rule that makes the order in which the perceptions (in the apprehension of this appearance) follow upon one another a *necessary* order.

In this case, therefore, we must derive the *subjective succession* of apprehension from the *objective succession* of appearances. Otherwise the order of apprehension is entirely undetermined, and does not distinguish one appearance from another. Since the subjective succession by itself is altogether [222] arbitrary, it does not prove anything as to the manner in which the manifold is connected in the object. The objective succession will therefore consist in that order of the manifold of appearance according to which, *in conformity with a rule*, the apprehension of that which happens follows upon the apprehension of that which precedes. Thus only can I be justified in asserting, not merely of my apprehension, but of appearance itself, that a succession is to be met with in it. This is only another way of saying that I cannot arrange the apprehension otherwise than in this very succession.’

My ‘wrong station’ experience

‘Recently on a train journey I got out at the station before the one I should have got out at. I had fallen asleep and, having awoken in haste, was hurrying not to get caught by the closing doors. Once I got out I found out that, in the month since I last travelled there, the concrete stairs had been turned round 180 degrees, there were now ticket barrier machines installed at the ticket office. I did have an odd uneasy, slightly uncanny, disconcerting, feeling, to be

sure. Then I saw the design and view of the station car park, totally different as it was. Only then I had a big 'aha', I 'clicked'. Yes! I had got out at the wrong station! Clearly, I had a brief temporary *delusion*. (Robert Pirsig records a parallel case.) My feeling of unease was due to the discrepancy between the believed perception, and the actual perception. It is uncanny, and a form of cognitive dissonance. One might say I had a very brief, low-key, psychosis, a momentary insanity. But if one bears in mind that normally this believed perception would be confirmed by, be congruent with, experiential data, and therefore remain *unchallenged* in its dominance, does it not then follow that we are always in a low key psychosis? In short, is 'sound commonsense' actually a psychosis of normality?'

### The Ames room



We cannot *deconstruct* objectivity without *assuming* objectivity (c.f., Russell's postulates in *Human Knowledge: its Scope and Limits*)

The analysis of temporality (Heidegger, KPM) in relation to the analysis of necessary objectivity (Strawson): and the relation of the self-consciousness issue to transcendental idealism: Active mentality and the implicit ontology: does Kant's recognition of *process as such* inherently lead to a constructivist/idealist view of experience? Here is where the amazing Kantian link, which opens the door for Hegel and therefore for Marx and the existential ontologists, occurs between *the analytic of temporal consciousness*, and the

*metaphysics of the constructivist analytic of objectivity.* Kant in this revolutionises our whole view of consciousness and, despite his anti-historical official trend, in fact inaugurates or massively deepens *the analysis of reflexivity expressed in historical time consciousness.*

The fundamental importance of the causal whole in Kant; the difficulty of grasping it even, the schematism quotation:

‘This schematism of our understanding, in its application to appearances and their mere form, is an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze. This much only we can assert: the *image* is a product of the empirical faculty of reproductive imagination; the *schema* of sensible concepts, such as of figures in space, is a product and, as it were, a monogram, of *pure a priori* imagination, through which, and in accordance with which, images themselves first become possible. These images can be connected with the concept only by means of the schema to which they belong. In themselves they are never completely congruent with the concept. On the other hand, the schema of a *pure* concept of understanding can never be brought into any image whatsoever. It is simply the pure synthesis, determined by a rule of that unity, in accordance with concepts, to which the category gives expression. It is a transcendental product of imagination, a product which concerns the determination of inner sense in general according to conditions of its form (time), in respect of all representations, so far as these representations are to be connected *a priori* in one concept in conformity with the unity of apperception.’

Intersubjectivity as the necessary supplement or corollary of Kant’s position (Husserl, Strawson)

Also Schopenhauer Heidegger and the central Archimedian role of the Body in subjectivity.

### III. Perception is a whole

Includes the causal dimension through our body (c. f., Heidegger *Being and Time*, and the dependence of science on technology)

This means that perceptually the whole cosmos is our body in relation (Leibniz)

We therefore evoke the Analogies of Experience, as unassailable implicit categories - causality, permanence, and reciprocity - in our perception. What Hume would say about this we can imagine but there is no doubt that this level of recognition of perceptual organisation, inspired by Kant, takes the recognition of rock reliable causality as the foundation of human experience, to a new level. (C.f., Russell’s postulates, HK)

Illustrations – Night sky, Eurostar going through the Channel Tunnel, Train moving next to us, my experience with riderless motorcycle in Oxford

‘Thus, although each created Monad represents the whole universe, it represents more distinctly the body which specially pertains to it, and of which it is the entelechy; and as this body expresses the whole universe through the connexion of all matter in the plenum, the soul also represents the whole universe in representing this body, which belongs to it in a special way.’ (Leibniz, *Monadology*, 1714/1998)

Kant and Heidegger in effect underwrite this concept.

*The totality of our visual perception is ourselves.* Imagine one (if sighted) is looking at a clear night sky sat in a garden, for instance. One's perception of both near and far objects, including one's body, is a whole. That whole includes the stars and it includes one's imagination of both every other perspective one can envisage, and one's sense of all the things one cannot see, stars, the sun, other galaxies, the microscopic, atomic level physics, and so on and on. It also radically and systematically, as Heidegger brings out best, includes the *causal accessibility* of the world to ourselves, as usable. Clearly one's vision and apprehension presents a hugely *distorted*, or at least perspectival, representation of whatever exists. But it is grounded in *the sense of background permanence some have invoked as 'being'*.

If we can make sense of 'existences in themselves' they do not involve perspective, up or down, high or low, far or near, seen and unseen elements, back and front, etc etc. Arguably all *perception* does. Kant's account inherently involves implicit perspective and therefore *cannot* be any sort of a re-creation of the world *as it is*. So his account of it as a seamless presentation of *the world of science* does not work.

But, therefore, whilst Kant and Schopenhauer are wrong in saying *nature is made by the mind*, it is true that the mind presents nature *as mind*, *as a, totally interpreted, sorting out of it for ourselves*, in the light of the best data it has, *which is very different at different epochs* (invoking the historicity of epochs, such as the bicameral epoch, and then the 'mediaeval' epoch, the Enlightenment Epoch, and so on, and on, in a Vico-Jaynes kind of mode). We see how differently the world *is*, perceptually, in different epochs, by architecture and technology, especially.

IV. Against this background, we face the paradox of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*:

1. It is a genuine and huge breakthrough, the most influential in Western philosophy since Aristotle;
2. Kant claims it as definitive and timeless;
3. However, it is clearly *not* definitive and timeless;
4. For, whilst there have been major and hugely potent interpretations or uses of it (for instance, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Barth, Sellars, Strawson), and whilst Kant has been *far and away the major common point of reference* between 'Continental' and 'Anglo-American' philosophy, (as well as underpinning the work of both Freud and Jung and their successors, and the novels and writings of Tolstoy, Proust, Thomas Mann, Joseph Conrad, Samuel Beckett, and DH Lawrence, to take a few instances), nevertheless, *no one has been able to agree* on precisely what it does achieve and what its essence is.

V. In its emergence, paradoxically again, it is *part of the Eighteenth Century Enlightenment's increasing attempts to define itself* – and to define itself *historically*. (For a powerful and comprehensive account see *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* by Karl Barth, the greater part of which, despite the title, is about Enlightenment Philosophical Thinkers, who were reacting to the Eighteenth Century, especially Rousseau, Lessing, Herder, Kant, Novalis, Hegel, Schleiermacher.)

While Kant presents his work as the definitive culmination, and completely *a-historical*, attempt of the Enlightenment to define itself 'Critically', seeing himself as essentially *looking*

*back, synthesising, and consolidating*, his work, in fact, is *essentially forward looking* and belongs, apparently somewhat counterintuitively, with the great expressions of the consciousness of *historicity* in their attempts at Enlightenment self-definition: Rousseau; Lessing; Herder; Hamann; Kant; Novalis; Goethe; Coleridge; Holderlin; Hegel; Schelling; Schleiermacher (c.f., Barth, op. cit.).

VI. So, whilst Kant, in one aspect, presents his work as definitively a-temporal, a-historical, and as definitively universal in scope, in fact *fundamental predicaments about the human sense of time are at the heart of it*.

VII. Now, Strawson (BS) offers us a very British commonsense view of Kant, which, whilst it brings into view with great clarity the element in Kant which is about *differentiating me from my world as the basis for my being able to be conscious of my own experience as my own*, essentially by-passes Kant's insights about *temporality* and their link to his concept of 'imaginative synthesis'. We can make a start on the more fundamental questions regarding the Critique, and its implicit exploration of historicity, by seeing if we cannot turn Strawson upside down, - or perhaps back the right way up, - unless we identify 'commonsense' in the ordinary sense question-beggingly as 'the right way up by definition'! I shall concentrate on two of his positions:

1. Strawson denies that there is any need to postulate a synthetic a priori. 'I see no reason why any high doctrine at all should be necessary here.' .... (BoS, p. 44.) Behind this stance lies the mainly unavowed view that all non-analytic, non purely logical, knowledge is *contingent*.
2. Strawson denies that Kant's doctrine of transcendental 'imaginative synthesis' ('nature as made by the mind') is coherent or intelligible. 'It is useless to puzzle over the status of these propositions. They belong neither to empirical (including physiological) psychology nor to analytical philosophy of mind, *though some of them may have near or remote analogues in both*. They belong to the imaginary subject of transcendental psychology, a part of the Kantian model.' (BS, p. 97); 'Perhaps that very connectedness of experiences, under concepts of the objective, which synthesis is held to produce, is itself the condition – or the fundamental condition – under which alone self-ascription of experiences is possible.' (BS, p. 96).

So where Kant says that the conditions of self-consciousness imply that we *create* a world according to the categories, Strawson's model implies the rather Heideggerian thought, but also this is a very British commonsense thought, that they require that we have already must have *discovered* one, which must magically or miraculously *already have fulfilled* (but with *no* disturbance of a totally inert concept of perception!) the required conditions. (Interesting Analogy to Art for Art's Sake!) This, like the later Wittgenstein's logical behaviourism, is a strange kind of inverted phenomenism.

Strawson accepts the standard linguistic philosophy stance, which implies that we cannot question fundamentals, such as causality and the external world, as Hume does, because they are in some sense *the foundations*, the conditions, of all our questionings, in any case, and therefore they 'just are as they are' (and ultimately implicitly contingent). This tallies quite well with his already mentioned inversion of Kant's own stance, whereby the necessary

conditions of self-consciousness are fulfilled, because the world already exists which enables them to be thus fulfilled, and we just discover it.

VIII. The fundamental reason why Strawson's position is untenable lies in the *totality* character of the intentionality of our spatio-temporal experience, and in the fact that *it changes, if at all, as a whole*. Examples: from speaking whole grammatical units, or music, adverts in a foreign language - and then extrapolate to the totality of experience. In the light of the earlier examples this now shows that *we seamlessly connect our experience temporally moment by moment, mostly without even realising it*. Kant's appeal to what is *structurally unconscious* is not unreasonable, since it is implicit for us all.

If we construe it as *embodied apprehension*, as sorting out livingly in experience and in action what is going on, rather than merely as representation, then the internalised grasp of causality, permanence, and reciprocity, which is involved in our reflexive response to a missile (a cricket ball, for instance) heading our way, comes to life. But, as Kant half recognises, it is inherently *aspectival* and *perspectival* and our sense of the whole cosmos 'in itself' is a construct or an implication of it. As people like Escher have shown, it can also be disrupted and exploited in disconcerting ways! Kant's three phase analysis, in the first edition of the Transcendental Deduction (in A) of conscious process makes sense, if viewed sympathetically.

Once this is realised, we achieve two connected realisations:

1. That, subject to the mentioned modifications, Kant is right about the organisation of our experience to a stunning extent.
2. In pursuing the implications he did *not* adequately pursue, we find that Kant was incredibly fertile in the field *he opened up for others to develop*.

IX. In the first edition of the Critique Kant makes *temporality* fundamental, whereas in the second edition he is much nearer to a Strawson kind of position that treats the organisation of experience as a given.

I give a Strawson like passage from the second edition and then the passages which refer to imagination and temporal process from the first edition:

### **Difference and Rules**

'This thoroughgoing identity of the apperception of a manifold which is given in intuition contains a synthesis of representations, and is possible only through the consciousness of this synthesis. For the empirical consciousness, which accompanies different representations, is in itself diverse and without relation to the identity of the subject. That relation comes about, not simply through my accompanying each representation with consciousness, but only in so far as I *conjoin* one representation with another [[according to a rule]], and am conscious of the synthesis of them. Only in so far, therefore, as I can unite a manifold of given representations in *one consciousness*, is it possible for me to represent to myself the *identity of the consciousness in [i.e. throughout] these representations*. In other words, the *analytic* unity of apperception is possible only under the presupposition of a certain *synthetic* unity. The thought that the representations given in intuition one and all belong to me, is therefore equivalent to the thought that I unite them in one self-consciousness, or can at least so unite them; and although this thought is not itself the consciousness of the *synthesis* of the representations, it presupposes the possibility of that synthesis. In other words, only in so far as I can grasp the manifold of the representations in one consciousness, do I call them one



and all *mine*. For otherwise I should have as many-coloured and diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious to myself.’

### **Temporality and imagination**

‘Every intuition contains in itself a manifold which can be represented as a manifold only in so far as the mind distinguishes the time in the sequence of one impression upon another; for each representation, *in so far as it is contained in a single moment*, can never be anything but absolute unity. In order that unity of intuition may arise out of this manifold (as is required in the representation of space) it must first be run through, and held together. This act I name the *synthesis of apprehension*, because it is directed immediately upon intuition, which does indeed offer a manifold, but a manifold which can never be represented as a manifold, and as contained *in a single representation*, save in virtue of such a synthesis. This synthesis of apprehension must also be exercised *a priori*, that is, in respect of representations which are not empirical. For without it we should never have *a priori* the representations either of space or of time. They can be produced only through the synthesis of the manifold which sensibility presents in its original receptivity. We have thus a pure synthesis of apprehension.’

‘If each representation were completely foreign to every other, standing apart in isolation, no such thing as knowledge would ever arise. For knowledge is [essentially] a whole in which representations stand compared and connected. As sense contains a manifold in its intuition, I ascribe to it a synopsis. But to such synopsis a synthesis must always correspond; receptivity can make knowledge possible only when combined with spontaneity. Now this spontaneity is the ground of a threefold synthesis which must necessarily be found in all knowledge; namely, the *apprehension* of representations as modifications of the mind in intuition, their *reproduction* in imagination, and their *recognition* in a concept. These point to three subjective sources of knowledge which make possible the understanding itself -- and consequently all experience as its empirical product.’

‘The original and necessary consciousness of the identity of the self is thus at the same time a consciousness of an equally necessary unity of the synthesis of all appearances according to concepts, that is, according to rules, which not only make them necessarily reproducible but also in so doing determine an object for their intuition, that is, the concept of something wherein they are necessarily interconnected. 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 the identity of its act, whereby it subordinates all synthesis of apprehension (which is empirical) to a transcendental unity, thereby rendering possible their interconnection according to *a priori* rules.’

X. Now, there is a puzzle, to which Kant was sensitive, as to how it is that we see *objects* at all, since the post-bicameral perspective of Objects, what emerges as commonsense and science, is a particular – post-Aristotelian! – phase of our historical consciousness. Kant simply recapitulates this. He cannot conceive of any other way of conceptualising than in terms of objects. Yet even so, it is beginning to dawn upon him, from the Aesthetic onwards, *that space and above all time do not yield to a conceptualisation in terms of the object paradigm* and that this determines how reality is shaped for us. For him too, the *multi-layered character of experience*, as shaped by its historicity, is beginning to emerge. *The Temporality he discovers is realised in his grasp of imaginative synthesis*. There is a dichotomy between the outcome – the Analogies, conceived of as apodictically certain and as objective and inherently ‘real’ – and the strangeness, the un-objectivity, of the basis, and also the

incompleteness of Kant's exploration of the basis in temporality. Vico first opens this up. Heidegger's oscillation concerning objectivity in this connection. *It is clear from a passage concerning primitive conceptions of the world (Being and Time trans Macquarrie and Robinson pp. 112-113) that Heidegger regards his own account of causal-equipmental 'significance' as merely a phase in the evolution of consciousness but this relativises his own whole account, in an Hegelian manner.*

So, in short, regarding temporality, Kant opens the way to Hegel's account of the evolution of consciousness as an *interpersonal and societal reality involving historicity*; he opens the way to Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's invocation of *the will and the body and perspective as our mode of connection with the world* and the human community; he opens the way to Heidegger's account of *temporality as foundational for our being-in-the-world*; he opens the way to Jaynes's explorations (which recapitulate Vico's) *of the evolution and constitution of consciousness itself*; and to the *deconstructivist recognition that context, circularly defined of course, pervades every last shred of our experiencing* and conceptual shaping of our world.

Kant, who had thought to found our experience of objectivity with an unheard of unassailability of certainty, turns out rather to mimic Louis XV's comment, 'Apres Moi Le Deluge', or, more optimistically, Apres Moi la Nouvelle Création du Monde!

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