

**Philosophy 203: History of Modern Western Philosophy**  
Spring 2010  
Tuesdays, Thursdays: 9am - 10:15am

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Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*  
Refutation of Idealism (AW 781-3)  
First Antinomy (AW 792-4)

## I. Refutation of Idealism

In the transcendental deduction, Kant argues that since the categories are *a priori*, then could not be derived from experience.

Either experience makes these concepts possible, or these concepts make experience possible. The first alternative is not what happens as regards the categories (nor as regards pure sensible intuition). For they are *a priori* concepts and hence are independent of experience...The categories contain the grounds, on the part of the understanding, of the possibility of all experience as such (B167, AW 755a-b).

He thus proposes a transcendental deduction, or derivation, or discovery, of the concepts.

But, he also considers a third path.

We might think of the categories as subjective conditions for our experience that lack objective status. They might just be necessary conditions for the way we see the world, and not conditions on how the world is.

That is, despite arguing that they are *a priori*, Kant has not shown that they are objective, or conditions on nature itself.

Someone might want to propose...that the categories are...subjective predispositions for thinking that are implanted in us simultaneously with our existence; and that they were so arranged by our originator that their use harmonizes exactly with the laws of nature governing the course of experience... (B167, AW 755b).

In such a case, Kant argues, the concepts would lack necessity even if our application of those concepts were necessary.

I could then not say that the effect is connected with the cause in the object (i.e. connected with it necessarily), but could say only that I am so equipped that I cannot think this representation otherwise than as thus connected. And this is just what the skeptic most longs for... (B168, AW 755b).

In other words, the alternative to seeing the categories as objective, since we can know nothing about the transcendental nature of the universe, is to see them as completely subjective.

The only alternative to the objectivity of the categories is Humean skepticism, which we have already seen was false.

We do have knowledge of the causal structure of the universe.

Kant takes on the problems of skepticism and idealism in the later section, the Refutation of Idealism.

“**Theorem** The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me” (B275, AW 782a).

First, Kant distinguishes between problematic idealism, which he attributes to Descartes, and dogmatic idealism, which he attributes to Berkeley.

The dogmatic idealist complains that space and time must be properties of the noumenal world.

But, since we can't know anything of the noumenal world, then we must have no knowledge of space and time.

Kant, by taking space and time to be pure forms of intuition, provides a context for rejecting dogmatic idealism.

We can take them to be objective properties without committing to knowledge of the noumenal world.

Thus, the real problem for Kant is the problematic idealist, by which term Kant refers to skeptic of the First Meditation.

Problematic idealism...alleges that we are unable to prove by direct experience an existence apart from our own...The proof it demands must...establish that regarding external things we have not merely *imagination* but also *experience*. And establishing this surely cannot be done unless one can probe that even our *inner* experience, indubitable for Descartes, is possible only on the presupposition of *outer* experience (B275, AW 782a).

## II. Tlumak on the Refutation of Idealism

The following is the version of the refutation found in Tlumak's book. We went over it in the final class of the semester.

1. I am judging.
2. Some act of judging is occurring.
3. Any act of judging is an act of consciousness or awareness.
4. Acts of consciousness or awareness are representative (have a content).
5. Awareness of the instantaneous is impossible.
6. So the content of awareness is non-instantaneous.
7. Any non-instantaneous content is a successive content, that is, a series of items occurring in an order, and not all at a single instant.
8. So judgmental awareness is of a succession of items.
9. Awareness of succession implies awareness of a plurality of items as a plurality - awareness of a diversity or manifold.
10. Awareness of a plurality of items as a plurality requires that the plurality be apprehended as a numerically identical collection over the time during which the awareness is occurring.
11. This identity of the manifold over time requires that the act of awareness of this identical manifold connect up or relate the various elements which comprise it, that is, be aware of all the elements together.
12. Such a connective awareness requires that earlier items in the series be recognized together with the later items, and that all the items be recognized as belonging to this unity over time.
13. Only a persisting, identical subject of awareness can be connective; a series or collection of diverse subjects of consciousness is incapable of such connective activity.
14. So any act of judgment requires a persisting judger.

15. An identical judger must be able to be aware of his unity of consciousness.
16. But awareness of an objectless awareness itself is impossible. I can be aware of consciousness only by being aware of the object of consciousness.
17. So awareness of a persisting consciousness requires awareness of a persisting object of consciousness.
18. So awareness of succession requires awareness of something persisting.
19. This something persisting cannot be an item in the series, or of the succession, since only by being aware of it can I be aware of the series.
20. This series of items (of acts of representation) constitutes my mental life.
21. So the persisting something is not part of my mental life.
22. But if something is not part of my mental life, it is existentially and attributively independent of me.
23. And since it is something which I can perceptually identify and which persists, it is re-identifiable.
24. So the persisting something required for awareness of succession, which in turn is required for judging, is an objective particular.
25. So I am aware of an objective particular.

## II. First Antinomy

Kant presents three antinomies to argue that reason has limits.

Some proper metaphysics can be established using synthetic *a priori* reasoning.

Other topics (e.g. God, free will) are beyond our ken.

Still, our reason, wanting answers to such questions, speculates.

The problem with such speculation is that we can argue on either side of the debate.

We can establish that the universe is infinite.

We can also establish that it is finite.

Since such antinomies can not hold, Kant sees such proofs as demonstrating that reason has exceeded its limits.

Here again, Kant has the revolutionary Hume as an influence.

We can commit such arguments to the flames.

The first antinomy concerns the finitude of the universe.

Kant argues that the universe has a beginning from the premise that an infinite series can not be completed.

If the universe existed from infinitely long ago, the present time would be the end of an infinite series.

So, there must have been some beginning.

For the spatial finitude of the universe, Kant claims that the concept of simultaneity presupposes a finite universe.

If the universe were infinite, we could not think of all of the universe as existing simultaneously.

Kant argues that the universe has no beginning in time from the logical impossibility of creation.

If there were a beginning point, there would have to be something before it.

But, that time would have nothing in it, since the universe has not been created yet, and so the universe would have no way to begin.

Kant's argument that the universe is spatially infinite assumes absolute space.

Imagine you were to go to the end of the universe.

Now, stick out your arm past the edge.

The container has to be infinite.

If we take the universe to be merely the contained portion, then we have no way to think about the container, the rest of space.

So, space itself must be the infinite container.

If one wants to leave out the void, and hence space as such, as an *a priori* condition for the possibility of appearances, then the entire world of sense drops out (A433/B461, AW 794b).

Remember, space is an *a priori* form of intuition, presupposed by all possible experience.

Kant thinks that claims about whether the universe is finite or infinite are matters for *a priori* metaphysical reasoning.

But, there are some mathematical and physical facts that undermine his claims.

Kant asserts that the universe must be spatially bound because otherwise we could have no definite concept of simultaneity.

But according to the theory of relativity, simultaneity and time itself are not definite concepts anyway.

They depend on the arbitrary choice of a frame of reference.

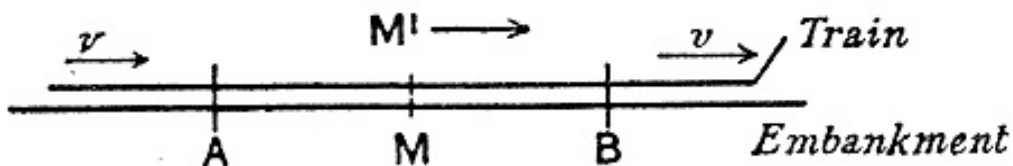
Imagine standing on a platform waiting for a train equidistant between two signal posts, A and B.

Imagine further that lights are flashed at A and B in a way that one perceives them as flashing simultaneously.

Now, consider a train traveling in the direction from A to B, passing you at the very moment that the lights are flashed.

To a perceiver on the train, the light at B will appear before the light at A, since the frame of reference (the train) is moving toward B, and away from A.

Events which are simultaneous with reference to the embankment are not simultaneous with respect to the train, and vice versa (relativity of simultaneity). Every reference-body (co-ordinate system) has its own particular time; unless we are told the reference-body to which the statement of time refers, there is no meaning in a statement of the time of an event (Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*, Chapter IX).



Similarly, Kant assumes an obsolete concept of infinity.

The true (transcendental) concept of infinity is this: that the successive synthesis of unit[s] in measuring by means of a quantum can never be completed" (A432/B460, AW 793a).

In the nineteenth century, George Cantor's work on transfinite numbers established that there are

different sizes of infinity.

To count from one size of infinity to the next, we consider the smaller infinity as complete.

Today, we often define a set to be infinite if it can be put into one-one correspondence with a proper subset of itself.

For example, consider the integers and the even integers, which are a proper subset.

The integers are infinite, since we can match each one with an even integer.

See the [appendix on infinity](#), or this [longer, fun discussion of infinite arithmetic](#).