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TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS,  
TRANSCENDENTAL SYNTHESIS AND  
TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM

BY QUASSIM CASSAM

Transcendental arguments are concerned with the specification of conceptually necessary conditions of the possibility of experience. Characteristically, the point of such arguments is to demonstrate that the necessary conditions include the truth of propositions which certain familiar forms of philosophical scepticism have traditionally regarded as doubtful or false. A transcendental proof does not proceed by showing that a given concept leads directly to another concept. Rather, as Kant remarks, the proof proceeds "by showing that experience itself, and therefore the object of experience would be impossible without a connection of this kind." (A783/B811)<sup>1</sup> Thus, the form of a transcendental argument will be this: there is experience; a necessary condition of the possibility of experience is the truth of P; therefore P.

It has sometimes been thought that a transcendental argument is unlikely to be successful without relying upon some version of the verification principle. I will suggest that the charge of verificationism is something of a side-issue. The enterprise of coming to see why this is so will, however, bring to light a related issue of very considerable importance, one which will merit extended comment. Discussion of this latter issue will take up the early part of this paper. It has also sometimes been thought that the use of transcendental arguments involves, or ought to involve, a commitment to transcendental idealism. I shall attempt to uncover one important assumption which might underlie this suggestion. It is an assumption which Kant himself made, but which, when made explicit, will be seen to be one which the transcendental arguer is under no obligation to accept. Discussion of this point will involve extended treatment of Kant's notion of 'transcendental synthesis'. It is to be hoped that the points of contact between the various issues described here will become clearer in due course and that the following exploration of the relationship between the notions of 'transcendental idealism', 'transcendental synthesis' and that of a 'transcendental argument' will cast much needed light upon the Transcen-

<sup>1</sup> All references in this form will be to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, as translated by Norman Kemp Smith (London, 1929).

dental Deduction of the Categories, a piece of philosophical reasoning which is as profound as it is opaque.

# I

Professor Stroud's influential defence of the suggestion that the use of transcendental arguments may amount to an application of some version of verificationism consists of two stages. Where S is a proposition the truth of which is claimed to be a necessary condition of the possibility of experience or language, it is asserted in the first stage that:

the sceptic can always very plausibly insist that it is enough to make language possible if we *believe* that S is true, or if it looks for all the world as if it is, but that S need not actually be true.<sup>2</sup>

According to the second stage of the argument, the transition from our beliefs to knowledge of the way the world actually is requires, or seems likely to require, certification by some version of the verification principle. It is Stroud's second stage which has attracted most attention, but the first stage is no less worthy of comment. For it is simply asserted, without anything in the way of supporting argument, that the sceptic can always "very plausibly" substitute his weaker claim for the stronger one made by the original transcendental argument. Once such a substitution has taken place, there will indeed be a gap to be bridged but the substitution will be resisted by the Kantian. He might insist, for example, that it is the *existence* of physical objects and not merely belief in their existence which constitutes a necessary condition of the possibility of experience, and if this is *true*, there will simply be no gap to be bridged, by the verification principle or otherwise. Stroud's claim that the sceptical suggestion will always be legitimate might, indeed, be read as suggesting that no such strong claim about conditions of the possibility of experience is likely to be defensible. If this is what Stroud had in mind, however, his grounds for thinking it remain unclear.

Nevertheless, Stroud's objection does bring out, albeit indirectly, an important challenge facing the Kantian. For if the sceptical substitution is to be resisted, if it is insisted that a necessary condition is the truth of S and not merely the belief that S is true, it will surely be reasonable to demand some account of what this necessity consists in and of what grounds there are for regarding the truth of S as necessary. Here, then, is an issue of the first importance, for until and unless there are answers to

<sup>2</sup> B. Stroud, "Transcendental Arguments", in R. C. S. Walker (ed.), *Kant on Pure Reason* (Oxford, 1982) p. 128.

these questions, the use of transcendental arguments will be viewed, and will deserve to be viewed, with suspicion. If, on the other hand, satisfactory answers are forthcoming, then Stroud's charge will have been undercut, for there will no longer be any gap to be bridged. Indeed, one might have thought that the task of providing an account of the kind of necessity involved in the weaker transcendental arguments permitted by Stroud is as pressing as the parallel task facing those who insist upon the stronger versions. For there are those who would question the claim that even belief in the truth of S is a necessary condition. Paradoxically, then, Stroud concedes too much to the Kantian, for he provides no defence of his claim about what transcendental arguments *can* achieve.

## II

A popular proposal is that when something is said to be a necessary condition of the possibility of experience, this is to be construed as analytic necessity. This is unlikely to satisfy even those without Quinean scruples. For a claim such as 'For experience to be possible, there must be physical objects' to be deemed analytic, it would need to be reducible to a logical truth by definitional substitution, but appeals to meaning or definition are liable to prove particularly problematic in the present area. One might simply insist upon a definition of 'experience' which produces the desired results, but the difficulties inherent in such a procedure are not difficult to discern. For if transcendental arguments are to retain any anti-sceptical force, their claims about the notion of 'experience' should not have, or appear to have, the character of an arbitrary stipulation. Yet to insist upon a definition which renders the analyticity claim plausible might not unreasonably be regarded by a sceptic as a disingenuous attempt to stipulate the truth of precisely that which is at issue. Disputes over what does and does not enter into the very meaning or definition of 'experience' are liable to prove insoluble and futile, for there is every likelihood that the definitional proposals under consideration will each have the appearance of having begged the substantive philosophical question. In view of the question-begging nature of appeals to meanings or definitions in the present context, the notion of analyticity would appear to be of correspondingly little value.

How, in that case, are we to proceed? My proposal is this: claims such as 'For experience to be possible there must be physical objects' are to be viewed as consisting of broadly two components:

- (C) a Conceptual Component
- (S) a Satisfaction Component

The Conceptual Component will typically propose certain conceptual truths concerning the notions of 'language' or 'experience', but these will not include claims about how 'the world' must be for language or experience to be possible. Frequently, though not always, it will be claimed by the Conceptual Component that the drawing of a particular distinction or the application of a certain concept is necessary for experience or language to be possible; it will then follow that experience *must* be of, say, objects, if it can be shown that only experience of objects could provide a basis for the drawing of the relevant distinctions or the application of the relevant concepts. Showing this is the job of the Satisfaction Component. More generally, the claim that for experience to be possible the world must be thus-and-so will be defended by showing that *only* a world of this kind could satisfy the requirements elaborated in the Conceptual Component.

What is there to be said for this proposal? It should be conceded, at the outset, that it does not solve what was earlier identified as the central difficulty facing transcendental arguments. If, previously, we puzzled over the status of the claim that, for example, for experience to be possible there must be physical objects, there is now a parallel difficulty concerning the status of the Conceptual Component. Earlier, we spoke somewhat vaguely about 'conceptual truths' concerning the notions of 'experience' or 'language', but much more will need to be said about the status of such supposed 'conceptual truths'. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that even if the current proposal does not solve the difficulty, it does render it more manageable, by breaking it down into its component parts. The weaker the claims made about notions such as that of experience, the more likely they are to be acceptable without begging the question. Perhaps the point may be put as follows: given that the sceptic doubts or denies the existence of physical objects, it seems far too quick a way with him to insist blankly that precisely that which the sceptic doubts or denies constitutes a necessary condition of the possibility of experience. The present proposal suggests a more indirect, less intolerant procedure. The first step might be to attempt to demonstrate the need, if experience is to be possible, for the drawing of a certain distinction. At this stage, no direct claim concerning the need for physical objects has been made, and it is to be hoped that the sceptic might be persuaded of the independent plausibility of the requirement that experience provide for the possibility of drawing the stated distinction. As yet, nothing has been said which is in *direct* conflict with the sceptic's position. Rather, the conflict is established indirectly, at the second stage of the argument, when it is shown by the Satisfaction Component that the world needs to be precisely as the sceptic doubts or denies it to be if it is to provide a basis for the drawing of an independently plausible distinction.

The best defence of the present proposal would be to show that it

accords with the procedure of a range of actual transcendental arguments. There are grounds for optimism on this score. In P. F. Strawson's argument from Unity to Objectivity in *The Bounds of Sense*<sup>3</sup>, it is claimed that experience requires the possibility of distinguishing "a component of recognition, or judgement, which is not simply identical with, or wholly absorbed by, the particular item which is recognized, which forms the topic of the judgement."<sup>4</sup> On the present proposal, this constitutes the Conceptual Component of the Argument. According to what is, in effect, the Satisfaction Component of the argument, only experience of objects whose *esses* are distinct from their *percipis* is capable of providing for the distinction between recognitional components and items recognized. Or, to take a second example, it is claimed by Kripke's Wittgenstein<sup>5</sup> that language requires a distinction between obeying a rule and failing to obey it, between using a word correctly and using it incorrectly. If this is the Conceptual Component, then the Satisfaction Component is constituted by the claim that the requirements of the Conceptual Component can only be provided for in a *community* of language users.

That these recent transcendental arguments should accord so well with the "two components" proposal is heartening. For all that, there can be little doubt that it is Kant's arguments, in particular his argument in the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories, which constitute the ultimate test for the present proposal. In the remainder of the present section, a reading of the Deduction will be suggested which, with minor qualifications, might plausibly be thought to lend further support to the "two components" proposal. This reading, it must be conceded at the outset, will be a somewhat artificial one, for it will involve concentrating upon one particular aspect of the Deduction, whilst resolutely ignoring another aspect which presents obvious difficulties for the "two components" view. Consideration of these difficulties, and the Kantian line of thought which gives rise to them, will be postponed until later sections.

In the first edition Deduction, Kant writes that "the *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of objects of experience." (A111) To establish this claim, it might be argued, is to carry out the fundamental task of the Deduction, for the categories are "fundamental concepts by which we think objects in general for appearances", (A111) and establishing their objective validity was said to consist precisely in showing that "so far as the form of thought is concerned, through them alone does experience become possible."

<sup>3</sup> P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (London, 1966) pp. 97–112.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> See S. A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Oxford, 1982), *passim*.

(A93/B126) As for the argument produced by Kant, its starting-point is the occurrence of a series of representations or intuitions. The first point made is that intuitions must be taken up into consciousness if they are to be part of our experience:

Intuitions are nothing and do not in the least concern us if they cannot be taken up into consciousness. (A116)

What is more, the consciousness into which intuitions are taken up must be self-conscious or at least potentially self-conscious:

It must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations. (B131)

Kant calls the self-consciousness which generates the 'I think' "original" apperception, to distinguish it from the consciousness of a Cartesian soul-substance:

This "I" is, however, as little an intuition as it is a concept of any object; it is the mere form of consciousness . . . (A382)

Kant speaks not only of pure apperception but also of the *unity* or "transcendental" unity of apperception. This is a point of considerable importance, for the notion of a *unified* consciousness is made to carry a great deal of weight in Kant's argument. Kant writes in the first edition:

There can be in us no modes of knowledge, no connection or unity of one mode of knowledge with another, without that unity of consciousness which precedes all data of intuitions, and by relation to which representation of objects is alone possible. This pure original unchangeable consciousness I shall name *transcendental apperception*. (A107)

In other words, Kant appeared to regard it as a conceptual truth that for experience to be possible, individual experiences must be taken up into a *unified* consciousness.

The next stage of Kant's argument is especially obscure. The key to it is the concept of a transcendental object:

The object is viewed as that which prevents our modes of knowledge from being haphazard or arbitrary . . . For in so far as they relate to an object, they must necessarily agree with one another, that is, must possess that unity which constitutes the concept of an object. (A104–5)

Perhaps the point here is that for appearances to count as appearances of an objective realm, they must display a distinctive kind of unity and

interconnectedness. Kant's central thesis, then, is that for the unity of consciousness to be possible, the appearances to be taken up into consciousness must display just this distinctive kind of unity and interconnectedness. Kant puts the point in the strongest possible terms:

The transcendental unity of apperception *is* (my italics) that unity through which all the manifold given in an intuition is united in a concept of the object (B139)

Given this reading of the Deduction, the two components of the argument are easily discernible. The Conceptual Component is represented by the following:

(C) For experience or knowledge to be possible, individual experiences must belong to a unified consciousness.

The Satisfaction Component is then that

(S) For the unity of consciousness to be possible, appearances must display such unity and interconnectedness as is possible only if they are appearances of objects. That is, only experience of objects could provide a basis for the unity of consciousness.

The two together yield, in effect: the *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of objects of experience. This, as Kant might have said, is precisely what we desired to prove.

To be sure, the Conceptual Component of this argument does not speak explicitly of the drawing of a certain distinction or the application of a certain concept being required for experience. It will have been noted, however, that it was not earlier claimed to be an essential feature of transcendental arguments that their Conceptual Components should take this form. Moreover, the other structural parallels between Kant's argument and the other transcendental arguments described earlier are surely not without significance. Kant's response to the sceptic about the external world is not to insist blankly that experience must be of objects, but rather to begin with a claim about experience which is not in direct or explicit conflict with anything the sceptic says. Indeed, the unity of consciousness requirement is one which one might hope to render independently plausible. The Satisfaction Component then makes a claim about how the world must be if the unity of consciousness is to be possible, the upshot being that the truth of something which *is* explicitly claimed to be doubtful by the sceptic is necessary if the unity of consciousness



requirement which, with luck, the sceptic will already have been persuaded to accept, is to be met.

There are two further features of the “two components” reading of the Transcendental Deduction which deserve comment. Firstly, the reading relied largely upon the first edition Deduction, and this might be thought to be a serious deficiency. This is a point which will be considered in due course, but first there is an even more serious charge to be examined, one which calls into question even the claim that the “two components” reading gives a satisfactory account of the first edition. It is a charge which turns on the apparent failure of this reading to take into account Kant’s idealism. The following section is devoted to an examination of this matter.

### III

It will have been remarked that the “two components” reading studiously avoided making any mention of a doctrine which figures prominently at several points in the Deduction, namely, transcendental idealism. On the “two components” reading, Kant was represented as, in effect, having proposed something like an “Objectivity Argument” in the Deduction, and it might be thought that the lack of attention paid to Kant’s idealism was well justified, for transcendental idealism brings with it many well-known and formidable difficulties, and if there is an Objectivity Argument in the Deduction which requires us to make no mention of transcendental idealism, why should it not be perfectly understandable that Kant’s idealism should have been pushed into the background?

Matters are less simple, however, for on a transcendental idealist reading, our understanding of the so-called Objectivity Argument is significantly altered. It is true that the Objectivity Argument was stated without reference to transcendental idealism, but once the full force of Kant’s idealism is acknowledged, there will be an important objection to interpreting the argument as straightforwardly supporting the “two components” proposal. This might, in turn, cast doubts upon the general adequacy of the proposal as an account of transcendental arguments, for the Transcendental Deduction must, surely, be admitted as a test case for any proposal concerning the nature of transcendental arguments.

It is easy to identify, in general terms, the difficulties posed by transcendental idealism for the “two components” proposal. These difficulties centre around the notion of a “Satisfaction Component”. It has been claimed that the Satisfaction Components of transcendental arguments state that the world must be thus and so if it is to satisfy the requirements of their Conceptual Components. We are presented, in other words, with the picture of a mind-independent reality happening to satisfy

certain requirements, and providing for the possibility of experiences. For Kant, however, references to “reality” or “the world” are ambiguous as between the world as it is in itself, and the empirical world, the world of appearances. Nature, the empirical world, is “merely an aggregate of appearances” (A114) and “appearances, as such, cannot exist outside us – they exist only in our sensibility.” (A127) Furthermore, the appearances constitutive of the empirical world must display a certain unity or order, and according to Kant this unity is *imposed* by the understanding; it is the outcome of our synthesizing activities:

Thus the understanding . . . is itself the lawgiver of nature. Save through it, nature, that is, the synthetic unity of the manifold of appearances according to rules, would not exist at all. (A126–7)

Thus when the Satisfaction Component of a transcendental argument claims that the “world” must be thus and so, this is to be understood as the world of appearances. From the perspective of transcendental idealism, our formulation of the Satisfaction Component is misleading insofar as it carries suggestions of “the world” passively satisfying certain requirements, whereas for Kant there is no particular way that the empirical world is independently of how we construct it to be.

All of this casts fresh light upon the Transcendental Deduction. On the “two components” reading, the objective validity of the categories is established by showing that there must be objects of experience if experience is to be possible, the categories being concepts of objects. For Kant, however, such a reading would be unacceptable, for it reverses the order of his priorities. It is not that we are justified in using the categories, concepts of objects, because for experience to be possible there must be objects; rather, the empirical world is a world of objects precisely because this is how we construct it to be, with the aid of the categories. In justifying the addition of the Refutation of Idealism to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant, as is well known, expressed outrage at the fact that the existence of things outside us should hitherto have been accepted merely on faith. In view of this, it is tempting to read not only the Refutation, but also the Transcendental Deduction as attempting to prove the existence of things outside us. This, however, is to risk misunderstanding the central thrust of the Deduction, for as Patzig has pointed out, the Deduction does not amount to a “proof that there is, after all, an objective world out there” but “rather concentrates on the idea that the system of categories is the only possible system which allows the unification of our subjective intuitions into one consistent and coherent body of knowledge”.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> G. Patzig, ‘Comment on Bennett’, in P. Bieri *et al* (eds.), *Transcendental Arguments and Science* (Dordrecht, 1979) p. 71.

It appears, then, that transcendental idealism does present certain *prima facie* difficulties for the “two components” proposal, both as a reading of the Transcendental Deduction in particular, and as an account of transcendental arguments in general. It remains to consider what the appropriate response to these difficulties might be. One somewhat brazen response would be the following: it is true, it might be said, that transcendental idealism threatens our proposal, but why should this matter? Transcendental idealism is itself a doctrine with numerous well-documented defects, and there is no reason why these defects should be permitted to infect Kant’s transcendental arguments. Of course, such a response presupposes the mutual independence of transcendental idealism and transcendental arguments, but what could be simpler than to show this? It is quite sufficient to say that what a transcendental argument shows is that the world must be a certain way for experience to be possible; it is a further, unnecessary step to insist that the world referred to is merely the world of appearances, and that it is in a way constructed by the understanding. This, presumably, was the point of Strawson’s characterization of transcendental idealism as superfluous to the essential structure of Kant’s reasoning, “an extra wheel, zealously but idly turning”.<sup>7</sup> As for the Transcendental Deduction, what was earlier characterized as Kant’s “Objectivity Argument” is a powerful, self-sufficient argument, and whilst it must be conceded that the picture of the Deduction which it paints is selective and partial, we are certainly not *compelled* to admit any of Kant’s transcendental idealist qualifications. If the *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of objects of experience, that is quite enough; there is no need to add that objects are after all only appearances, mere representations of our sensibility. At best such a qualification is superfluous, at worst incoherent and at odds with what the transcendental argument seems to have established.

Yet all of this still leaves important questions unanswered. For if transcendental arguments and transcendental idealism are so easily separable, why is it that Kant did not recognize this? What was it that motivated Kant to locate his transcendental arguments within a transcendental idealist framework when in retrospect it seems utterly obvious that such arguments are independently viable? Are we simply to put this down to confusion or to obtuseness? There must surely be a more sympathetic account of the matter. The notion of a “transcendental argument” is, after all, a Kantian one, and if, as part of our defence of the two components proposal, we are to reject the framework within which Kant himself used

<sup>7</sup> *The Bounds of Sense*, p. 257.

such arguments, it is surely not unreasonable to expect some plausible account of Kant's *motives* in presenting transcendental arguments as wedded to an idealist framework. In what follows, an attempt will be made to unearth *one* such motive in the Transcendental Deduction. The use of transcendental arguments outside their original Kantian framework will appear far more securely based once a detailed account has been provided of one of the central considerations which might have resulted in Kant failing to separate what have come to be referred to as the "two faces" of the Critique, and once those considerations have been shown to carry insufficient weight or to be, in some other way, dubious.

Let it be granted that the key to the possibility of experience is the unity of consciousness and that the key to the unity of consciousness is that the appearances taken up into consciousness should display a certain degree of unity and interconnectedness; Kant sometimes expresses the point by speaking of the need for appearances to be "associated". The significance of the "association" of appearances first becomes apparent in Kant's discussion of the three stages of synthesis in A. The first stage is the Synthesis of Apprehension in Intuition, which Kant also refers to as "empirical synthesis". (B164) Different representations occur in the mind separately and singly; it is required that the manifold be combined, and it is the function of empirical synthesis to effect such a combination. As Kant puts it "by *synthesis of apprehension* I understand that combination of the manifold in an empirical intuition, whereby perception . . . is possible." (B160) Such a combination would not be possible, however, without the Synthesis of Reproduction in Imagination. This is the function of the reproductive faculty of imagination, which reinstates preceding perceptions alongside subsequent ones, and which is bound by the following "law of reproduction":

. . . representations which have often followed or accompanied one another finally become associated and so are set in a relation whereby, even in the absence of the object, one of the representations can, in accordance with a fixed rule, bring about a transition of the mind to the other. (A100)

This law of reproduction is an empirical law, and reproductive synthesis a function of empirical imagination. Kant insists, quite correctly, that empirical imagination could not operate if appearances came to us purely at random, without consistent associations. If cinnabar were sometimes red, sometimes black, sometimes light, sometimes heavy, "our empirical imagination would never find opportunity for exercise appropriate to its powers, and so would remain concealed within the mind as a dead and to us unknown faculty." (A100) Indeed, if representations came to us in

random order, they would not provide for *experience* at all: the play of representations would be blind, less even than a dream.

Recognizing this, Kant insisted that the associations upon which reproductive synthesis rests must themselves have some objective basis or ground, something which makes the reproduction of appearances possible. At first sight, it is not clear what Kant is searching for here. Surely, it might be said, what makes reproductive synthesis possible is simply that representations *are*, as a matter of fact, associated, that they do not occur purely at random. That Kant would have been dissatisfied with this response is suggested by his insistence that the *ground* of reproductive synthesis should be *a priori*. (A101) It is even more strongly suggested by the following passage in which Kant makes it quite clear what is to be required of the objective ground of the association of representations:

Now if this unity of association has not also an objective ground which makes it impossible that appearances should be apprehended by the imagination otherwise than under the condition of a possible unity of this apprehension, it would be entirely accidental that appearances should fit into a connected whole of human knowledge. (A121)

As Walker has suggested, it may be that the precise details of Kant's account of the various faculties involved in synthesis ought to be taken with a pinch of salt.<sup>8</sup> Even if this is so, however, Kant's fundamental point seems clear, namely, that it should not turn out to be a *contingent* fact that appearances should display such order and regularity as is necessary for them to be constitutive of experience, as opposed to a mere blind play of representations. Necessity is therefore involved in Kant's conception at two distinct levels<sup>9</sup>, although Kant frequently slides from one to the other without apparently noticing the difference. On the one hand, there is the *conditional* necessity involved in the Objectivity Argument, namely: necessarily, if there is experience, then appearances must display a certain degree of order and interconnectedness. On the other hand, it is also *unconditionally* necessary that appearances should display that degree of order and interconnectedness which is required for the proper functioning of the faculty of reproductive synthesis. Without the unconditional necessity, it would be seen to be merely contingent that appearances happen to "fit into the connected whole of human knowledge", and it was his unwillingness to tolerate such an upshot which Kant registered by his

<sup>8</sup> R. C. S. Walker, *Kant* (London, 1979) p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. R. Harrison, "Transcendental Arguments and Idealism", in G. Vesey (ed.), *Idealism Past and Present* (Cambridge, 1982), especially pp. 215–8.

demand that the association of appearances should have an “objective ground” which excludes such an outcome.

Having set out the requirement that the association of appearances should have some objective ground, in the sense just set out, Kant proceeds to satisfy the requirement by appealing to two related notions, those of ‘affinity’ and ‘transcendental synthesis’. The first of these is easier to pin down:

The ground of the possibility of the association of the manifold, so far as it lies in the object, is named the *affinity* of the manifold. (A113)

As for the phrase ‘transcendental synthesis’, this holds the key to Kant’s argument. Kant’s thought appears to be the following: if appearances were things in themselves, there would be no way of avoiding the consequence that it is merely accidental that empirical imagination should be in a position to function. Thus, appearances cannot be things in themselves, and their interconnectedness is itself *produced a priori* by the imagination. Thus, it is no accident that appearances should fit together so as to constitute experience precisely because the connectedness of appearances required for the functioning of empirical imagination and ultimately for the possibility of experience is, as it were, put there by what Kant calls the “*transcendental* function of imagination”. The activity of the transcendental function of imagination is labelled “transcendental”, “productive” or “figurative” synthesis, and Kant characterizes this form of synthesis in the following terms:

Imagination is the faculty of representing in intuition an object that is *not itself present* . . . But inasmuch as its synthesis is an expression of spontaneity, which is determinative and not, like sense, determinable merely, and which is therefore able to determine sense *a priori* in respect of its form in accordance with the unity of apperception, imagination is to that extent a faculty which determines the sensibility *a priori*; and its synthesis of intuitions, conforming as it does to the *categories*, must be the transcendental synthesis of imagination. (B151–2)

All of this renders intelligible a passage in the first edition Deduction which would otherwise be quite obscure. In defending his demand that some objective basis should be found for the association of appearances, Kant writes that without such a basis, “even though we should have the power of associating perceptions, it would remain entirely undetermined and accidental whether they would themselves be associable”. (A121–2) At this point the argument takes a curious twist; the initial difficulty was to

find that which renders appearances or perceptions *themselves* associable. But Kant goes on:

There must, therefore, be an objective ground . . . which constrains us to regard all appearances as data of the senses that must be associable in themselves . . . This objective ground of all association of appearances I entitle their *affinity*. (A122)

What is curious about this is the shift from viewing the “objective ground” as that which renders appearances associable “in themselves”, to viewing it as that which constrains us to *regard* all appearances as associable in themselves. On the face of it, these are by no means the same, and Kant would appear to be somewhat confused on this point. With the doctrine of transcendental synthesis in the background, however, Kant’s move appears intelligible, for our *regarding* appearances as associable is, in a way, sufficient to render them associable. For the association of appearances is a product of transcendental synthesis, so that if “regarding” appearances as associable is construed as transcendentially synthesizing them, then our regarding them as associable ensures that they *are* associable. In view of this, Kant’s conclusion is now intelligible:

the affinity of all appearances, near or remote, is a necessary consequence of a synthesis in imagination . . . (A123)

It is also clear now that the following passage is to be taken quite literally:

Thus the order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle *nature*, we ourselves introduce. We could never find them in appearances, had we not ourselves . . . originally set them there. (A125)

The purpose of the foregoing was to come to some understanding as to why, if it is genuinely the case that the use of transcendental arguments carries no commitment to transcendental idealism, Kant should have presented his central transcendental argument in the Transcendental Deduction in such close association with transcendental idealist theses. Or, to relate the matter to our earlier proposal concerning the structure of transcendental arguments, what is now required is some account of Kant’s motivations in insisting, as he surely would have, that the “world” referred to in the Satisfaction Components of his transcendental arguments is to be understood as the world of appearances only, the outcome of our synthesizing activities. The correct account of this matter is now quite clear; in the Objectivity Argument, a connection was first of all established between the possibility of experience and the unity of consciousness; it was then argued that the unity of consciousness itself depends upon



appearances displaying a certain kind of unity and interconnectedness. It just so happens that appearances do, as a matter of fact, provide a basis for the unity of consciousness, but for all that has been said so far, it is plain that appearances might not have done so, and there is no guarantee that they will continue to do so. There is evidently a certain insecurity in such a position, and this is precisely what Kant found unacceptable. From the present perspective, it is simply a happy coincidence that nature should direct itself according to the subjective ground of apperception; Kant, in contrast, required that it should be no accident that appearances should fit together into a connected whole of human knowledge. This, as noted, is the force of Kant's talk of the association of appearances having some objective ground, and given this requirement, it is easy to see that the adoption of some form of idealism is the only way of satisfying it. For if nature were a thing in itself, then it would be entirely accidental that appearances should fit into a connected whole of human knowledge, but this cannot be deemed to be accidental, *therefore* nature cannot be a thing in itself, and it can be known *a priori* that it will accord with the unity of apperception. It is only because nature is a mere aggregate of appearances, and because the association of appearances is the product of a special form of synthesis, namely, transcendental synthesis, that we can be certain that nature will continue, as it were, to play the game by our rules. Thus, the transcendental idealist objection to the "two components" reading of transcendental arguments is that whilst the Satisfaction Component states what must be the case if the requirements of the Conceptual Component are to be satisfied, the Satisfaction Component does nothing to show that these requirements need *actually* be satisfied. Yet, once it is demanded that it should not be merely a contingent fact that the requirements are *actually* satisfied, then it would seem that the "world" referred to in the Satisfaction Component cannot be a thing in itself. These various lines of thought are well expressed in the following passage:

That nature should direct itself according to our subjective ground of apperception . . . sounds very strange and absurd. But when we consider that this nature is not a thing in itself but is merely an aggregate of appearances, we shall not be surprised that we can discover it only . . . in transcendental apperception . . . Nor shall we be surprised that just for this reason this unity can be known *a priori*, and therefore as necessary. (A114)

How should the defender of the "two components" proposal respond to Kant's case for amending the Satisfaction Component along transcendental idealist lines? The appropriate response is surely the following: the crux of



Kant's argument is the demand that it should be seen to be impossible that appearances should be apprehended otherwise than under conditions of the unity of apperception. What is quite striking, however, is that at no point in the Deduction does Kant offer a plausible defence of this requirement. It is, throughout, an unargued assumption of Kant's that there should, in effect, be some guarantee that appearances will fit into the "connected whole of human knowledge", but it is surely appropriate to wonder whether a guarantee on this matter ought to be sought. There are two distinct questions to be considered in the present context: what must appearances be like if they are to provide a basis for the unity of consciousness? Secondly, *why* are appearances such as to provide for the unity of consciousness? The first of these, it may be granted, is a legitimate philosophical question, but it is far from clear that the second is a question with which philosophy is obliged to concern itself. It is enough, the defender of the 'two components' proposal might insist, that appearances *do* conform to the conditions of the unity of apperception; they might not have done and they might not continue to do so, and whilst this might give rise to a certain sense of insecurity, this degree of insecurity simply has to be tolerated.

Perhaps the point may best be illustrated by sketching a *broadly* Humean response to Kant's argument. Just as for Kant there is a "law of reproduction of appearances", so for this Humean position there is a "principle of union among ideas". This is the principle that:

When every individual of any species of objects is found by experience to be constantly united with an individual of another species, the appearance of any new individual of either species naturally conveys the thought to its usual attendant.<sup>10</sup>

The appearances thus united are united not by reason but by the imagination; at the same time, the conjunctions or uniformities upon which this function of imagination is dependent are not guaranteed 'in the nature of things', for "there can be no *demonstrative* arguments to prove that those instances of which we have had no experience, resemble those of which we have had experience."<sup>11</sup> This Humean position is certainly not committed to the view that the imagination could operate in conditions of total chaos. This amended Humean position will agree with Kant that if appearances came to us at random, they would not provide for *experience* at all; it is therefore prepared to endorse the Kantian thesis that for experience to be possible,

<sup>10</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, second edition, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1978) p. 93.

<sup>11</sup> *Treatise*, p. 89.

appearances need to display a certain – for present purposes – unspecified degree of unity and interconnectedness. It will differ from Kant's position, however, in being content to leave the matter at that. The conjunctions or associations upon which experience depends are, as it were, bedrock facts; as the historical Hume put it, somewhat inelegantly: "We cannot penetrate into the reason of the conjunction."<sup>12</sup> In these terms, Kant's error lay precisely in his attempting to penetrate into the "reason of the conjunction".

Indeed, Kant's appeal to the notion of 'transcendental synthesis' is quite unsuccessful, even in its own terms. The difficulty may be brought out indirectly by first of all considering one possible misunderstanding to which the phrase '*productive* synthesis' might give rise. It is tempting to express Kant's thought as follows: it is no accident that the raw material of experience conforms to the conditions of the unity of apperception precisely because the raw material is itself produced by the transcendental function of imagination, which is therefore able to guarantee raw material of the right kind. It was not Kant's view, however, that the *matter* of experience is itself a product of transcendental synthesis. As Kant puts it:

... the manifold to be intuited must be given prior to the synthesis of understanding, and independently of it. How this takes place, remains here undetermined. (B145)

The function of transcendental synthesis is merely "to determine sense *a priori* in respect of its *form*" (B152, my italics) or in respect of its character. There remains a given element in experience; it is only the *connectedness* of perceptions which is produced by productive synthesis.<sup>13</sup> As Kant himself stresses, when he speaks of the representation making the object possible, rather than vice-versa, he is not speaking of production of the object insofar as *existence* is concerned, for, he adds, "we are not here speaking of its causality by means of the will". (B125)

The idea of the *connectedness* of perceptions, rather than the perceptions themselves, being a product of transcendental synthesis is an extremely curious one. It appears to carry the implication that the matter or "given" element in experience is itself characterless. For if the given came with a determinate character already stamped upon it, and if this character was such that perceptions were not in themselves associable, then there would be little that the transcendental function of imagination could do to rescue empirical imagination. Indeed, the same difficulty which arose at the level

<sup>12</sup> *Treatise*, p. 93.

<sup>13</sup> The phrase 'the connectedness of perceptions' is borrowed from Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, p. 94.

of empirical synthesis threatens to resurface at the level of transcendental synthesis. The difficulty was that if empirical imagination was to be able to operate, its raw material would need to be of a certain character; productive imagination was then introduced as a faculty whose function it was to ensure that empirical imagination was provided with serviceable raw material. But a parallel difficulty arises in respect of productive imagination: how is it to be ensured that the “given” element in experience possesses the appropriate character for *it* to carry out *its* task, if we are not to posit yet another faculty? If an unending regress of faculties is to be avoided, it would seem that there is little choice but to insist that the given is itself characterless, so that transcendental synthesis can, as it were, carry on unhindered by recalcitrant raw material. The difficulty with the response, however, is that it merely substitutes Charybdis for Scylla, for it is arguable that the notion of a characterless given is itself incoherent.

It appears, therefore, that the idealist amendment to the “two components” proposal is flawed in both motive and execution. As we have seen, one of Kant’s motives in presenting his transcendental arguments within an idealist framework was a desire to provide an account not only of *what* appearances must be like if they are to provide for the possibility of experience, but also of *why* or *how* it is that appearances *are* such as to provide for experience, for Kant seemed to require some *guarantee* that appearances will fit into the “connected whole of human knowledge”. It seems quite plain, however, that the second of Kant’s questions is not one which the transcendental arguer is *obliged* to answer. Thus, one of the central motivations for insisting that the world referred to in the Satisfaction Component is merely the world of appearance, the outcome of our synthesizing activities, is no longer present. In the light of this, the idealist amendment to the notion of a Satisfaction Component may be dismissed without any trace of a bad conscience, and the original proposal retained.

#### IV

At the end of section II, a critic was envisaged as objecting that the “two components” reading failed to give an adequate account of Kant’s procedure in the second edition of the Transcendental Deduction. It would therefore be appropriate, at this point, to attempt to demonstrate that the matter is less serious than might be supposed.

Kant’s argument in the first stage of the two stage deduction in B is as follows: individual representations must be taken up into consciousness, they must, as Kant puts it, be “subject to the original synthetic unity of apperception”. (B143) The act by means of which the understanding brings representations to the unity of apperception is the act of judgement.

Given that the categories are involved in the act of judgement, it follows that "... the manifold of a given intuition is necessarily subject to the categories". (B143) The force of this argument becomes clearer when it is observed that Kant characterizes judgement as a relation which is "objectively valid", so that

... to say that 'the body is heavy' is not merely to state that the two representations have always been conjoined in my perception, however often that perception be repeated; what we are asserting is that they are combined *in the object*, no matter what the state of the subject may be." (B142)

In other words Kant is here defining "judgement" so as to include only what he characterizes in the *Prolegomena* as "judgements of experience,"<sup>14</sup> that is, judgements which concern objective particulars. Given that the categories are concepts of objects in general, it comes as no surprise to find that the categories are involved in "judgements of experience".

It must be confessed that there is little sign here of the "two components" structure, but the defender of the "two components" reading might well find consolation in the following line of thought: Kant's argument in the second edition is, it might be said, quite unpersuasive as it stands. It is uncontroversial that individual representations must be taken up into consciousness, and it may be granted further that the act by means of which representations are brought to the unity of apperception<sup>15</sup> is some form of judgement. What is not uncontroversial, however, is Kant's insistence that the judgements involved in taking representations up into consciousness need to take the form of objectivity judgements, "judgements of experience". It is all very well, this line of thought might continue, stipulating that judgement involves knowledge of an object, but a sceptic will see Kant's argument as generating the following dilemma: if, on the one hand, the term "judgement" in Kant's argument is understood narrowly, to mean 'objectivity judgement', then one will surely be entitled to wonder *why* it should be accepted that it is judgement in *this* sense which is necessarily involved in bringing representations to the unity of apperception. Why should it not be supposed that all that is required is that representations be brought to the unity of apperception by means of what the *Prolegomena* calls "judgements of perception", that is, judgements about the current psychological states of the subject? However – and this is the second horn of the dilemma – whilst it may be less controversial that the

<sup>14</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* . . . , edited by P. G. Lucas (Manchester, 1953) section 18.

<sup>15</sup> *Prolegomena*, section 18.

self-ascription of experience requires judgement in at least the latter sense, it would seem that the categories, being concepts of objects, are not directly involved in judgement in *this* sense. As Kant himself remarks in the *Prolegomena*, judgements of perception “do not need a pure concept of the understanding but only the logical connection of perception in a thinking subject”. It is true that the second stage of the second edition Deduction attempts to show that even judgements of perception, which Kant refers to in the Transcendental Deduction as the “synthesis of apprehension in intuition” or “empirical synthesis”, are subject to the categories, but Kant’s main argument on this score must be deemed an abject failure.<sup>16</sup> The most that the argument shows is the involvement of the concepts of space and time in the synthesis of apprehension, but it is evidently a mistake to identify these concepts with the categories. If Kant’s characterization of the categories as concepts of objects is taken seriously, the failure of his argument in the second stage of the second edition Deduction should come as no surprise.<sup>17 18</sup>

It is clear what the defender of the “two components” proposal will see as the way out of the dilemma. For he will see Kant’s insistence upon the role of judgements of experience in bringing representations to the unity of apperception as defensible in the light of the so-called “Objectivity Argument” of the first edition Deduction. To make objectivity judgements is to see representations as *unified* in a special way, and the reason why the judgements by means of which individual representations are brought to the unity of apperception must take the form of objectivity judgements is precisely that for the unity of consciousness to be possible, representations themselves must be unified in just such a way as to constitute representations of an objective realm. Might this not explain Kant’s remark in the second edition that in the judgement that “bodies are heavy”, I assert that these representations “belong to one another *in virtue of the necessary unity* of apperception”? (B142) It appears, then, that if a defence is required of Kant’s remarks on judgement in B, it is to be found among considerations which are prominent in A. If this is correct, if it is indeed the case that a major part of Kant’s overall case is to be found in A, then the reliance of the “two components” reading upon the first edition Deduction will seem less tendentious.

<sup>16</sup> See the Transcendental Deduction in B, section 26.

<sup>17</sup> For a different reading of the phrase ‘concepts of objects in general’, see Walker, *Kant* pp. 85–6.

<sup>18</sup> There is a supplementary argument in B for the involvement of the categories in empirical synthesis. The argument is that the categories are involved in transcendental synthesis, and *therefore* in empirical synthesis, given that empirical synthesis is dependent upon transcendental synthesis (see B164). At best, this shows that the categories are *indirectly* involved in empirical synthesis.

## V

According to the Satisfaction Component of what has been referred to as Kant's "Objectivity Argument", for the unity of consciousness to be possible, appearances must display such unity and interconnectedness as is possible only if they are appearances of objects. This is a claim which has so far gone unchallenged; even during the course of the idealist detour of section III, it was assumed that appearances needed to have the character of appearances of an objective realm in order to provide a basis for the unity of consciousness. The extra step taken during the course of the idealist detour was to insist that the objective content of appearances is introduced or produced by the synthesizing mind, but the underlying assumption is the same. The time has now come, it would seem, to challenge what has so far gone unchallenged. *Why* is it that the unity of consciousness should only be possible in these circumstances? "The transcendental unity of apperception", Kant remarks "is that unity through which all the manifold given in an intuition is united in a concept of the object", (B139) but some *defence* of this claim is surely required. At this point, the reader of the Deduction is liable to make the startling discovery that Kant provides *no* defence whatsoever of this claim, upon which the Deduction turns. Kant simply asserts that "the unity which the object makes necessary" somehow provides for the unity of consciousness, but his reasons for thinking this remain quite obscure. Indeed it even appears at times that Kant's thesis turns on nothing more than a play on words: for the *unity* of consciousness to be possible, appearances must display a certain *unity*, just such unity, it transpires, as marks them out as appearances of objects. It goes without saying, however, that the mere appearance of the same word in two different contexts is no guarantee that one is explained by the other.

Before pursuing this point further, there is another important question which calls for, but which does not receive, an unequivocal answer from Kant. According to the Conceptual Component of the Objectivity Argument, for experience to be possible, individual experiences must be taken into a unified consciousness. It is evidently a matter of some importance to determine what Kant took to be the status of the Conceptual Component. It appears, at first sight, that he regarded it as analytic. He sometimes writes of the "analytic unity of apperception", and at one point it is claimed that:

This principle of the necessary unity of apperception is itself, indeed, an identical and therefore analytic proposition. (B135)

Assessing the significance of this passage is not entirely straightforward, for what is described as “the principle of the necessary unity of apperception” is a combination of various strands of thought; it includes for example, the thought that “all *my* representations in any given intuition must be subject to that condition under which alone I can ascribe them to the identical self as *my* representations”, (B138) and this much may indeed be conceded to be analytic. On the other hand, it also includes the thought that for experience to be possible, individual experiences must belong to a consciousness which displays a very *specific* kind of unity, and one may be more reluctant to view this as analytic. For the kind of unity required is *just* such as could be provided for by experience of objects, and by no other kind of experience. Indeed, the articulation of Kant’s argument into a Conceptual and a Satisfaction Component has a slight air of artificiality precisely because Kant provides his reader with no way of pinning down what is meant by the phrase “unity of consciousness” other than in terms of the kind of experience which is thought to be (uniquely) capable of providing for it, and none of this is likely to be convincing as it stands. If, on the other hand, the Conceptual Component is modified so as to appear a more plausible candidate for the status of “analytic truth”, then the Satisfaction Component is threatened. There may be *a* sense of unity in which it is analytically true that experience requires a unified consciousness, but it is unlikely that *this* sense would be nearly strong enough to rule out the possibility of the required unity being provided for by a kind of experience other than experience of physical objects. There are signs of a dilemma here: if the Satisfaction Component is to be retained as it stands, then it would seem that Kant is committed to an implausible Conceptual Component. If, on the other hand, the Conceptual Component is amended, the element of uniqueness in the Satisfaction Component begins to look indefensible. One response to this objection would be to insist that the strong sense of unity required for Kant’s argument to go through is not analytically necessary for experience to be possible but is nevertheless “conceptually” necessary in some non-analytic sense. Many modern transcendental arguments do appear to rely upon just such a notion of non-analytic, conceptual necessity, but to invoke such a notion at this stage would be less than helpful, for it is itself in need of a great deal of explaining.

These issues may be sharpened by turning once again to the central transcendental argument in Strawson’s *The Bounds of Sense*. Strawson claims that it is a necessary condition of the possibility of experience that it should be possible “even in the most fleeting and purely subjective of impressions, to distinguish a component of recognition, or judgement, which is not simply identical with, or wholly absorbed by, the particular



item recognized, which forms the topic of judgement".<sup>19</sup> The suggestion is then that a pure sense-datum experience would fail to provide a basis for the drawing of this distinction. As Harrison has pointed out,<sup>20</sup> on one reading Strawson's distinction is just the distinction between the particular object (internal accusative) which is a judgement is about and the qualities which it is judged to have, but it is arguable that this *is* provided for by the hypothesis of a pure sense-datum experience. On another reading, however, the recognitional component becomes "the portion of an experience which is subjective, and which relates to awareness of an object in isolation from the object itself". On this reading, the hypothesis of a pure sense-datum experience is ruled out, but at the same time the claim that the distinction of a component of recognition in the latter sense is an analytically or "conceptually" necessary condition of the possibility of experience is questionable.

It should by now be possible to discern a certain general type of strategy which is open to the critic of transcendental arguments. Presented with any specific transcendental argument, the critic may respond with two challenges. The first, which may be labelled the *Status Challenge*, concerns the status of the Conceptual Component. When it is claimed that the drawing of a certain distinction is necessary for experience or language to be possible, the critic will demand, and will be within his rights to demand, an account of the kind of necessity which this is supposed to be. If the Kantian eschews talk of analyticity and appeals instead to a notion of non-analytic, "conceptual" necessity, he will need to explain what this alleged necessity consists in. At one point in *The Bounds of Sense*, Strawson raises the question of how it is possible to establish that experience *must* exhibit such-and-such general features, and replies that "this is just an abbreviated way of saying that we can form no coherent or intelligible conception of a type of experience which does not exhibit those features."<sup>21</sup> If it is claimed that we cannot form an intelligible conception of a kind of experience which does not exhibit a feature F because it is *necessary* that experience should exhibit F, then clearly no explanatory progress has been made. If, on the other hand, Strawson's remark is read as suggesting that the 'must' is to be thought of as reflecting our imaginative limitations, what is to prevent the sceptic from retorting that such an account merely undermines the hardness of the 'must'? To paraphrase a remark of Crispin Wright's in a different context, if we cannot conceive of experience not exhibiting F, then that is how things are with us; is it not a further tendentious step to

<sup>19</sup> *The Bounds of Sense*, p. 100.

<sup>20</sup> In "Strawson on Outer Objects", *Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1970).

<sup>21</sup> *The Bounds of Sense*, p. 271.



inflate our imaginative limitations into a metaphysical discovery?<sup>22</sup>

The second challenge, which may be entitled the *Uniqueness Challenge*, concerns the relationship between the Conceptual and Satisfaction Components: is it really the case, the critic will ask, that *only* experience of a certain specified kind could provide for whatever is claimed to be necessary by the Conceptual Component? This objection may take one of two forms: even if we can only think of one type of experience which could satisfy the requirements of the Conceptual Component, does this not leave open the possibility of alternatives which would do just as well, but which we have been unable to think of? Of course, if it is claimed to be *conceptually* true that only experience of the specified kind would be capable of satisfying the requirements of the Conceptual Component, this will simply invite a version of the Status Challenge in response. In all probability, however, the critic will not even accept that we can only think of one way in which the requirements of the Conceptual Component might be met. Rather, he will attempt to describe an entirely different kind of experience which would do just as well. To rule out the critic's alternative, the Conceptual Component may need to be strengthened, its demands made more rigorous, but now the critic will attack from the other side, as it were, and claim that the strengthened Conceptual Component is an even less plausible candidate than its predecessor for the status of "analytic" or "conceptual" truth.

The upshot of these considerations is not that transcendental arguments are necessarily doomed to failure. It would be over-hasty to conclude that it is impossible *in principle* to devise interesting anti-sceptical transcendental arguments which are capable of meeting the challenges successfully. In practice, however, given the quite formidable difficulties which they face, the prospects of mounting a successful defence of transcendental arguments seem dauntingly unpromising.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> There is obviously much more to be said about the relationship between necessity and imagination. See, e.g. E. Craig, "The Problem of Necessary Truth", in S. Blackburn (ed.) *Meaning, Reference and Necessity* (Cambridge, 1975) and Crispin Wright, *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics*, ch. 22.

<sup>23</sup> I am grateful to Sir P. F. Strawson, David Wiggins, R. C. S. Walker, Simon Blackburn and John Campbell for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.