THE SYSTEMATIC KANT AND THE SEARCHING HUME

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JANUARY 12TH, 2015

Kant drew inspiration from Hume's emphasis on the mind and also his boundary for philosophy to not go beyond possible experience, but ultimately sought to place metaphysics on a firmer ground than the Scottish empiricist by establishing a system by which we can understand human cognition. Whereas Hume thought that the mind's powers were strictly confined to working with the materials afforded it by experience, Kant argued in his *Critique of Pure Reason* that it is the mind that makes experience possible in the first place. He therefore set about outlining an entire system of principles that reflect the human mind's governing mechanisms for unifying representations. Hume's more economical theory of mental processing has two main elements: first, that all our ideas are mere copies of "lively perceptions"[1] or what he called impressions; and second, there are principles of connection of ideas that reflect how one thought transitions to another. Kant developed a more elaborate theory of the mind. According to him, the mind, which is comprised of three fundamental faculties (Sensibility, Imagination, and Understanding), actively combines representations together and comprehends the unity of their separate sensory elements (their manifoldness) in a process he called synthesis. It is not until the understanding's pure synthesis in accordance with pure concepts that provides cognition in its final form. The defining role of the mind is in judging or thinking, which is cognition through concepts. Finally, the concepts that are used in judgments contain representations under them, such that there are functions of unity drawing "many possible cognitions together into one."[2]

The method by which Kant discovered these pure concepts of the understanding is nearly as important as his ultimate contribution because it is through this method that we can gain assurance that the "enumeration is complete and entire"[3], a vision for the philosophy of mind which was actually first established by Hume. Kant distinguished his orderly and systematic approach in discovering the pure concepts ('the categories') from Hume's more "haphazard" (A81) technique in discovering the principles of connection,

which ultimately depend on "whim or chance" (A67), as well as Aristotle's unprincipled discovery of categories as he "rounded them up as he stumbled on them" (B107). Kant organized the categories into four classes of concepts, which were in turn split into two divisions. The first contains the mathematical categories, which are concerned with objects of intuition. The second division consists of the dynamical categories, which refer to the existence of these objects in terms of their relation to each other or to the understanding itself (in the case of the Modality class). Within each of the four classes, there are three categories, of which the third always arises from the combination of the first two. It is this more genuinely reflective and purposeful method that I believe enables Kant to succeed in his ambitious aim of "outlining the plan for the whole of a science" (B109), and indeed, providing the intellectual foundation for all human thought. Nevertheless, there is still a value in Hume's searching, which reveals the interconnectivity of thoughts.

The aims of this essay are to explore to what extent Kant's systematic approach and transcendental[4] perspective on the mind succeed in going beyond Hume's principles of connection, which are derived from experience, and to determine in what ways (if at all) the Humean principles remain intact. After introducing the Kantian and Humean principles of the mind and explaining how they were discovered, I will provide examples of judgments that support the constructs proposed by both philosophers.

I. The Categories and the Method Behind Their Discovery

Before outlining the categories, Kant provides his readers with some insight into his thought process prior to his discovery of them. He declared that transcendental philosophy must seek its concepts "in accordance with a principle" and determine the connections among them "in accordance with a concept or idea" (B92). But what is this principle and idea? That overarching principle is the absolute unity of *a priori* cognition of the understanding. Kant saw quantity, quality, and relation (the first three classes of categories) as constituting the entirety of the content of a judgment, and modality as concerning the value of a judgment to thinking in general. The elementary and pure concepts that comprise these classes represent the sum total of all the cognitive possibilities of the human mind, essentially an absolute unity. The central idea that

governs the interconnections between concepts (and indeed in the case of a single category, Community) is that of reciprocal determination, as in an aggregate. There is a coordination of one element with the other simultaneously and reciprocally, as in the case when the understanding represents the divided sphere of a concept, and the members of the division exclude each other yet are connected in one sphere (B113).

Table of Categories

I.
Of Quantity
Unity
Plurality
Totality

II.
Of Quality
Reality
Negation
Limitation

III.
Of Relation
Of Inherence and Subsistence
(*substantia et accidens*)
Of Causality and Dependence
(cause and effect)
Of Community (reciprocity
between agent and patient)

IV.
Of Modality
Possibility – Impossibility
Existence – Non-existence
Necessity – Contingency

In the Table of Categories, Kant harnessed this idea in a more subtle way when considering the first two categories of each of the four classes. While he did not explicitly indicate this idea is at work in terms of how he discovered the categories, he observed that there is a "similar connection" as the reciprocal determination in an aggregate, in contrast to the unilateral determination in a series, when thinking of "an entirety of things" (B113). The categories are supposed to reflect the entirety of human cognition through concepts, so it seems plausible that this idea informs their delineation by Kant. In the Quantity class, the concept of Unity excludes that of Plurality. Plurality considered in its pure form excludes the concept of Unity. Yet, both Unity and Plurality are clearly in the same sphere of Quantity. In the Quality class, Reality (as in the case of a sound) excludes the concept of

Negation (silence), yet both reflect phenomenological attributes in the same sphere of Quality. In the Relation class, which concerns the existence of objects of intuition with respect to each other, the first two categories are Inherence and Subsistence (i.e., substance and its properties) and Causality and Dependence (i.e., cause and effect). Substance conceptually refers to an entity or body that may undergo change of some kind (through the powers of causation) and has accidental properties but endures nonetheless. Causality signifies the necessary connection between two events or phenomena in terms of cause and effect. These two are reciprocally related to each other, since when one posits Substance, he excludes any connection it has with other substances, and when one posits Causality, he is merely referring to the necessary connection *between* two phenomena or events (emanating from substances). Substance is in the Relation class since it is that inherence which enables one to discern it from other substances. It is intuitive to understand how Causality falls under the Relation class. Finally, in the Modality class, there are the categories of Possibility-Impossibility and Existence-Non-existence. Possibility does not necessarily entail existence, and non-existence does not necessarily entail impossibility. One category refers to the actual world and the other to the potentialities within it, but nevertheless they are both part of the general sphere of existence at some level. In the first three classes, there is a dichotomy yet simultaneous connection between the first two categories, demonstrating that 'opposite ends of the spectrum' are being occupied within a given realm. In the Modality class, Existence and Possibility are two different modes of occurrence, and their dual presence in the Table is needed. This is only the first prong of Kant's logical approach to uncovering the categories, but it is certainly the most important one.

Now that I have analyzed the basis for the first two categories in each of the four classes, I will explain the significance of the third categories with respect to their more elementary preceding concepts. In the Quantity class, Totality signifies 'allness' or "plurality considered as a unity" (B111). In the Quality class, Limitation represents a combination of Reality and Negation in the sense that a given phenomenological event or level is present "until a certain point" in space or time, beyond which there is an absence of it. In the Relation class, the Community category reflects the idea of reciprocal

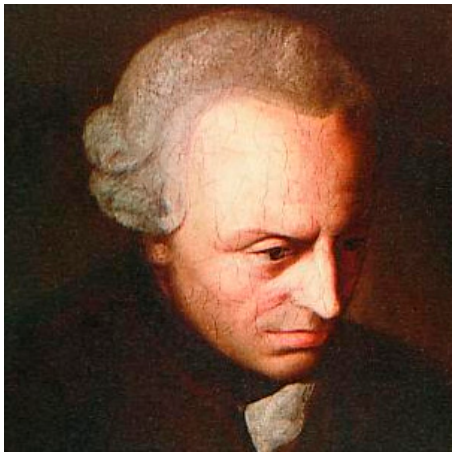
determination discussed earlier. Community signifies an interaction between parts such that there is a relation of cause and effect between ground and consequence but also that the consequence determines the ground, in turn constituting a whole with the latter (B113). Community is thus a combination of Substance (representing the idea of a 'whole') and Causality (since it comprises reciprocal causation). In the Modality class, Kant defines Necessity as "nothing other than the existence that is given by possibility itself" (B111), although it is of course a form of existence that occurs in all conditions. In the first three classes, the combinations that yield the third categories serve to exhaust the possibilities by offering a middle ground concept for the mind. Necessity is not so much a middle ground for Modality as it is the strongest possible form of existence, whereas Possibility is the weakest. I believe this analysis supports the argument that through the categories, Kant "exhausts the entire field of pure understanding" (A65), which he sought out to do in the first place.

Aside from the methodology, just discussed, that Kant used to think about how to discover and organize the categories, the German philosopher also systematically developed a set of criteria necessary for the production of a given concept. Indeed, these requirements for individual cognitions are in fact derivatives of the categories of Unity, Plurality, and Totality. First, in every cognition of an object there is unity of the concept, called qualitative unity, so that only the unity of the comprehension of the manifold of cognition is thought, just as in the case of the "unity of the theme in a play, a speech, or a fable." Second, there must be truth in terms of a plurality of consequences that correspond truly to the given concept. This is called qualitative plurality. Finally, perfection is required so that the plurality of consequences can be "traced back to the unity of the concept, and [agree] completely with this one and no other one," called qualitative completeness, or what is in essence, totality (B114/115). That these logical criteria for the categories to agree with actual cognitions are fulfilled only further bolsters Kant's position that his theory is complete and entire.

II. The Upshot of Kant's Systematic Approach

Whereas Kant focused his intellectual energies on the mind's various mechanisms prior to it even having coherent thoughts or experiences, Hume was interested chiefly in

the thoughts themselves, and how they reflect experience, both in their content but also in how they transition from one to the next. Hume invented the notion that in analyzing the sequence of thoughts *A* followed by *B*, there are essentially three possibilities for their association with one another, although there are on occasion "particular [thoughts] that break in upon the regular chain of ideas" which are "immediately remarked and rejected."[5] These different trains of thought are categorized in Hume's three principles of connection or association: resemblance, contiguity (proximity in space or time), and cause and effect. In all three principles, there is a presupposition that memory is involved in calling back a perception to generate the subsequent thought.



Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). German philosopher widely regarded for his contributions to metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, and aesthetics. Image source: Wikipedia

David Hume (1711-1776). Scottish historian, philosopher, economist, diplomat, and essayist known for his philosophical empiricism and skepticism. Image source: Wikipedia

Cause and effect actually incorporates the first two laws since to infer a causal relationship based on repeated observations there must be resemblance between the pairs of events and contiguity between the two elements of each pair (cause and effect). There is, in addition, clearly an element that the cause and effect principle has which the other two do not. Hume uses the example of "mentioning one apartment in a building [naturally introducing an enquiry or discourse concerning the others" for contiguity, and the thought of a wound preceding the "[reflection] on the pain which follows it" for cause and effect[6]. The first difference is that the wound and the pain are events as opposed to objects. Second, there is an ordering in time, which certainly does not apply to one's thinking of

various apartments in a building (since one could start or end in various places and it would not make a difference). Kant argued there is a necessary ordering in time of causality, which is not dependent on experience, and so therefore it is an innate principle:

> The concept, however, that carries a necessity of synthetic unity with it can only be a pure concept of understanding, which does not lie in the perception, and that is here the concept of the relation of cause and effect, the former of which *determines* the latter in time as its consequence, and not as something that could merely precede in the imagination.[7] (my emphasis)

One might argue that there does not seem to be a major difference between Hume and Kant on this question of cause and effect, though the former argued that our judgment of cause and effect is a mere custom based on repeated observations (i.e., it is contingent). According to both, there is still the critical element of one event preceding the other. The question is to what extent can cause and effect be known based on experience. As we have seen, within Hume's framework, there is an affinity between all three principles of association as they relate to cause and effect. To gain more assurance that one can infer an event's cause, then, we must have a high degree of confidence and certainty as it relates to time and resemblance. Do we? Through his reflective and more thorough approach, Kant not only answers in the negative but also goes beyond Hume by identifying what is being taken for granted. On the matter of time, Kant concedes its empirical reality, since our representations do succeed one another, but we are conscious of them only "according to the form of inner sense" (B54). In anticipation of Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity[8], Kant thus disputes time's "absolute and transcendental reality" (A37) and maintains that time "is not something in itself, nor any determination objectively adhering to things" (B54). If time is relative to the subject or observer, this calls into question the meaningfulness of attributing causality between events based on perceptions. Just as with time, there is a potentially deeper consideration in the case of resemblance, which Hume did not take into account. Kant contemplated the implications of the great multitude of perceptions and concluded that empirically speaking, we could have no substantiation even for detecting similarities:

> If among the appearances offering themselves to us there were such a great variety- I will not say of form (for they might be similar to one another in that) but of content, i.e., regarding the manifoldness of existing beings – that even the most acute human understanding, through comparison of one with another, could not

> detect the least similarity (a case which can at least be thought)… no understanding at all would obtain, since it is the understanding that has to do with such concepts.[9]

Thus, we can know *a priori* that every event has a cause but can hypothetically fail to observe this empirically speaking. I believe this analysis supports Kant's claim that the birthplace of the causal principle is in the mind, not in the world of experience. Given that, there is in turn a basis for the idea that there are *other* pure concepts of the understanding, which as Kant plausibly argued, were completely exhausted through his Table of Categories. At the deepest metaphysical level, then, Kant's arguments and ideas call into question the significance of all three of Hume's principles of connection. Aside from the specific pitfalls of these principles, Hume's searching method of considering and examining "several instances" of each, "never stopping till we render the principle as general as possible"[10], was not a well thought out approach according to Kant. "The concepts that are discovered only as the opportunity arises will not reveal any order and systematic unity, but will rather be ordered in pairs only according to similarities and placed in series only in accord with the magnitude of their content" (A67/B92), Kant warned his readers in a reference to Hume, before going into great detail of how he discovered his own principles. Nonetheless, there is still a Humean influence evident in Kant's ideas: first, in addressing the question of the causal principle, albeit in a different way; and second, in restricting the mind's scope to the realm of possible experience.

III. THE COMMUNITY OF HUMEAN AND KANTIAN IDEAS

We have seen how there are metaphysical weaknesses inherent in Hume's principles of connection. However, these problems do not invalidate their significance *completely*. At the psychological or empirical level, Hume's theory on the association of ideas seems intuitively correct and Kant does not deny this (A113). By considering the following two *a posteriori* judgments, we can see how their elements are supported by Kant's categories, and that Hume's empirical rules of association only serve to complement the analysis in various ways.

1) The penthouse apartment in the building offered the lowest level of noise of all the units.

Kantian categories: Totality (building), Plurality (multiple apartments), Quality ('lowest level' implies scale of noise sensation)

Humean principles: Contiguity (other apartments in building will come to mind)

2) If the building on the corner is painted white, it would remind me of an ice glacier each time I look at it.

Kantian categories: Possibility (color change), Substance (color changes but building endures)

Humean principles: Resemblance (building similar in shape to ice glaciers)

It seems that Kant's categories and Hume's rules of association can co-exist, corresponding to different phases of mental processing. Still, the transitions between thoughts presuppose that appearances are themselves subject to the rules discovered by Kant. As Henry Allison reminds us[11], Kant argued his categories enable us to have a unified experience (uniting manifolds of representations in one consciousness, so that memory is possible) without which the psychological associations Hume identified would be meaningless:

> If cinnabar were sometimes red, sometimes black, sometimes light, sometimes heavy… my empirical imagination would never find opportunity when representing red colour to bring to mind heavy cinnabar.[12]

To sum up, Kant's deeper perspective and more systematic philosophical method enables him to simultaneously lay the foundations for and transcend Hume's principles, while in certain respects, negating them, at least at a metaphysical level. Nevertheless, Hume's insights into the dynamism of thought endure alongside Kant's all encompassing theory of the human mind.

NOTES

[1] Hume, David. "Section II - Of the Origin of Ideas." *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748). Harvard Classics ed. Vol. 37. P.F. Collier & Son, 1910. Print. §3.

[2] Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). The Cambridge Edition. New York: Cambridge UP, 2009. A69. Print.

[3] Hume, "Section III: Of the Association of Ideas", §3.

[4] "Transcendental" refers to Kant's approach to seek an understanding of the very conditions of possibility of experience. Also, *a priori* could be appropriate here, as it is prior to any experience. Kant determined the categories purely by reflecting on the forms of judgment of the human mind.

[5] Hume, Section III: Of the Association of Ideas, §1

[6] Hume, Section III: Of the Association of Ideas, §3

[7] Kant, B234

[8] Einstein's theory defines time as the succession of events. Since the speed of light (the speed of information transmission) is constant, the observer will perceive the simultaneity of events differently from others.

[9] Kant, A654/B682. The passage is used in the following book chapter: Breitenbach, Angela. "Kant on Causal Knowledge." *Causation and Modern Philosophy*. Ed. K. Allen and T. Stoneham. London: Routledge, 2011. 201-219. Print.

[10] Hume, Section III: Of the Association of Ideas, §3

[11] Allison, Henry. "Transcendental Affinity - Kant's Answer to Hume." Ed. L.W. Beck. *Proceedings of the Third International Kant Congress* (1972): 204-05.

[12] Kant, A100 (See Note 11 for Allison article in which this passage is referenced, p. 204)