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The Development of the Role of the Spectator in Kant's Thinking: The Evolution of the Copernican Revolution

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Abstract

In this paper I discuss the development of Kant’s Critical project in the pre-critical writings. I am particularly focusing upon the problems that Kant encounters in developing the idea of a transcendental subject. This helps us to understand the radical nature of Kant’s project in which he not merely turns around the relationship between subject and object, but also has to redefine the nature of the subject. The development of the subject starts with Kant’s idea of an observer who actively determines qualities in the object (instead of passively taking it in). Ultimately the spectator becomes a subject that is constituted *a priori* independent of experience. In order to get to this idea of a subject Kant needs to overcome the tradition that in many ways still determines his thinking.

The Development of the Role of the Spectator in Kant's Thinking: The Evolution of the Copernican Revolutionⁱ

Introduction

Kant's Copernican Revolution in metaphysics brings a new way of thinking in which the subject becomes central. The difficulty in understanding this reversal of the roles of subject and object does not lie in the reversal of these roles, but rather in the constitution of a subject that can fully function in this new role. It is in this respect significant that it is not so much Kant's idea of the Copernican Revolution that constituted a problem for Kant. As I argue in this paper, it is rather a radical new systematic approach that needed development. By following the development of the subject in Kant's pre-critical writings we can understand the development of his systematic approach. Grasping this development and the difficulties he encountered will enable us to discern the most important elements of Kant's new system.

When considering Kant's pre-critical writings, the secondary literature often emphasizes Kant's early concern with the conditions and limitations of knowledge.ⁱⁱ Also Kant's search for an adequate basis or method for metaphysics is often discussed.ⁱⁱⁱ While I fully agree that these issues are important for Kant, I want to emphasize an important and ignored aspect of his early thinking, namely the role of the spectator that is slowly developed in the pre-critical writings.^{iv} While a spectator is not identical to a subject, I the notion of the spectator Kant is developing the idea that the observer is not merely receiving data, but actively modifies the received data. While the subject of the critical project modifies intuitions by categorizing and judging, the spectator

discussed in, especially, the early pre-critical writings, modifies that which is observed through pre-suppositions. As such the observer is actively determining the qualities of objects.

This insight that the subject is an active component in determining objects shows, on the one hand, that Kant's revolution in metaphysics is not a sudden insight. More importantly, the fact that it takes Kant more than twenty years to formulate this insight into a systematic theory will tell us that it is very difficult for Kant to constitute a new theory that does not fall back into the old metaphysics. Especially his "failed" attempt in the dissertation – followed by eleven years of silence – bears witness to this difficulty.

Before turning to Kant's pre-critical writings, I will first briefly discuss Descartes' influence upon the early Kant, in particular the idea to start from a clean slate. This discussion will make it possible to compare and contrast Kant's initial Cartesian method with the transcendental method. It is my thesis in this regard that Kant's method through his *Dissertation* of 1770 is not radical enough even while he claims to forget the past in a Cartesian fashion.

The New Beginning: Descartes, Motion and Rest, and Swedenborg

Descartes' method of doubt, and the foundation of a ground that cannot be doubted, is often regarded as the starting-point of modernity. Descartes' investigation of all former beliefs is – in line with the necessary methodological first-person perspective – presented as an investigation of his own beliefs, but its scope certainly lies beyond a private project, as he wants to establish something "firm and lasting in the sciences."^v This method of doubt itself creates the starting-point of modernity by doubting everything that is thought prior to this moment. To doubt all previous beliefs implies to doubt all previous accomplishments in the sciences, or – to be more precise – to doubt the ground or foundation of those accomplishments. The doubt of these

foundations “will cause whatever has been built upon them to crumble of its own accord.”^{vi}

Hence, all scientific discoveries before this new era have no foundation and are reduced to nothing.^{vii}

Descartes’ method presupposes that we can make a radically new beginning in which the mistakes of the tradition are overcome. It is exactly this presupposition that can also be found in Kant’s earliest writings. In his *New Theory of Motion and Rest*, published in 1758, Kant asks the reader to take up Descartes’ disposition (*Verfassung des Gemüts*) to “forget all learned concepts and to take the road to truth guided by nothing but pure sound reason.”^{viii} This Cartesian disposition is necessary for a new approach of the concepts of motion and rest. Traditionally motion is understood as a change of place, a quality of the object itself. Kant, in this essay, does not reject that motion is a change of place, but emphasizes that an object is in motion or in rest in relation to an external point of reference. In line with the Newtonian tradition, Kant then describes motion in terms of laws that are external to the object.

Within this Newtonian framework, it seems that Kant seeks to establish motion and rest as dependent upon the observer, instead of determining motion and rest as qualities of the object, as the tradition does. “Now, I can relate a body to particular other objects which are surrounding it. When this relationship does not change, I would say that this body is at rest.”^{ix} Kant adds that it is possible that when one changes the observation from the closest surroundings of an object to a more distant object, one finds motion, instead of rest. What occurs here is a change in perspective of the observer, which brings about a change in judgment. Kant illustrates such a change of perspective with the following example.^x One is observing a ball lying on a table of a ship that supposedly lies tied to the banks. When one sees the ball resting on the table, one has to say that the ball is at rest. However, shortly after saying this, Kant continues, “I look outside of

the ship to the bank and I realize that the line with which the ship was tied to the bank is untied and that the ship is slowly carried down the river; directly I say: no doubt the ball is moving from morning till evening along with the stream.”^{xi} Through this change of perspective, in which the point of reference changes from the table to the banks of the river, the determination of the motion of the ball is changed. The next perspective taken into account by Kant is the perspective in which the point of reference is changed from the banks (or the earth) to the sun as the center of the universe: in relation to the system of the planets, the whole earth is “ from morning till evening in an even faster motion.”^{xii} When we take the movement of the earth in account, the ball (as well as the banks of the river) continuously move(s), even when the ship is tied to the banks.^{xiii} These simple and quite obvious examples show something important: when we observe motion and rest we can relate an object to different surrounding objects, in this example to the table, the banks or to the sun.

For a contemporary reader it might seem that the main reason, for Kant, to introduce the spectator here is to show the relativity or subjectivity involved in determining motion and rest. In observing an object and determining motion and rest the role of the observer is to actively relate an object to another point of reference. As such, the observer is, to a certain extent, determining whether an object is in motion or in rest. Accordingly, in changing his/her perspective the observer of the object makes different judgments about the motion or rest of the object. While such an argument would be entirely in line with Kant’s later thinking, in this essay he does not take such a direction. Instead of emphasizing the subjectivity of motion and rest, he emphasizes merely a different kind of objectivity in the forms of the laws of nature that relate different objects. It is not the spectator’s presuppositions, i.e. his/her way of observing, or his/her

perspective, that determines whether the object is in motion or in rest. Instead, he argues that the object can be objectively determined in terms of physical forces.

This conclusion is, perhaps, disappointing as it remains within the traditional framework. When Kant asks his reader to forget for a moment the concepts learned from the tradition, in order to let reason take the road to truth without any other guide, a contemporary reader will expect a more radical approach.^{xiv} Kant's Cartesian mode suggests that he is trying to rid philosophy of everything false by letting reason do its work in a pure manner. Descartes destroyed the tradition by pulling away its foundations; Kant proposes a radical amnesia in which one forgets the traditional concepts and perspectives that led to error, and held the truth at bay. This methodological step implies that the reader who observes Kant's ideas has to change perspective. Kant asks the reader to forget the concepts of the tradition in order to be able to make such a change. Whether such a change is possible in the radical way Kant suggest here is doubtful – a topic I will return to later.

While Kant's conclusions in the essay on Motion and Rest are far removed from the new metaphysics he will ultimately establish, we can regard it as a first attempt to think through the subjectivity that lies in qualities of objects such as motion and rest. This idea is taken to a different level, in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics* (1766). In this essay Kant argues against the proof of the immortality of the soul (as we find it among others in Wolff) by comparing such a proof to the observations of Swedenborg, a so-called spirit-seer, i.e., someone who has contact with the spirit-world. Kant discusses this spirit-world as being part of the immaterial world (*mundus intelligibilis*) and as such he distinguishes this world from the material world. The immaterial world is not to be confused here with what he later discusses as the intelligible or noumenal realm of reason. The immaterial world is rather “dead matter” and is

the animating principle, “the ground of life”^{xv} that constitutes the material world. In summary, this world consists of “all created intelligence [...] the sensible subjects in all animal species [...] and [...] all the other principles of life.”^{xvi}

As Kant is writing a polemic, he is not concerned with the claim that these spirits exist. Swedenborg’s (and Wolff’s) mistake is, however, that in his observations of the spirit-world he applies the concepts and categories of the material world. Here, one could say, Kant again emphasizes the role the observer has in determining that which s/he observes. Kant points out how Swedenborg, for example, applies spatial concepts of the corporeal world to the world of the spirits. Likewise, Wolff and others apply concepts of the material world in order to prove the immortality of the immaterial soul. According to Kant, the respective concepts of these worlds, such as the concepts of space, are completely distinct from one another. In the spirit-world “the soul of someone in India may often be the closest neighbor of the soul of someone in Europe.”^{xvii} The spatial concepts of the visible world can thus not be applied to this immaterial world. Swedenborg (as well as Wolff) does exactly this, by using the “human forms,” such as extension, in determining the relationship between the different spirits. The immaterial spirit-world and the material “human” world are, as such, confused. Swedenborg’s mistake is that he observes the spirits “as if he were looking at it with bodily eyes.”^{xviii} If the spirit-world exists (or if the soul is immortal) it must be a world (or realm) without extension, only perceivable through an inner sense. Swedenborg’s (and Wolff’s) observations are based upon the presupposition that there is a correspondence between the two worlds. Kant regards this correspondence as nonsense, or a sense-delusion. The spirit language (*Geistersprache*) is combined with ordinary language and in this combination the inner world is externalized.^{xix} The role of the observer Swedenborg is not passive and objective, but he is active in determining the spirit-world by using the language and

determinations of the material world. How the spirit-world is determined, thus, depends upon the observer. As a polemic against, among others, Wolff Kant's text argues for a clear separation of the material and immaterial world, whether the latter be the spirit-world or the soul. A confusion of these two worlds originates in false presuppositions about the nature of the immaterial world.

In an attempt to overcome presuppositions that lead to confusion, Kant includes reflections upon his own method. In this regard he is particularly interested in finding a method in metaphysics that can take the "*a priori* path" without being directed to an "*a posteriori* point."^{xx} He criticizes those philosophers (presumably the philosophers who attempt to prove the immortality of the soul) who claim to start from pure, secluded contemplations (*reinen, abgesonderten Betrachtungen*)^{xxi} while they already have completed the whole argument. Their theory (namely, that the soul is immortal) is already complete while they claim to start with some objective contemplations. Kant wants to find a metaphysical method that starts from *a priori* principles, without having an *a posteriori* end in mind.^{xxii} As in the essay on motion and rest where Kant claimed to make a new start and asked his readers to forget the concepts of the tradition, Kant here again emphasizes the purity of his contemplations. In this case he emphasizes that there is not yet a completed theory. He attempts to make pure observations and let reason alone do its work on the way to truth by starting from pure *a priori* principles that are not part of an already completed theory. As Descartes in the *Meditations* wanted to abandon the mistakes of the tradition and start again from a firm foundation, Kant, in the Dreams-essay, takes pure *a priori* principles separated from a theory as the firm foundation of metaphysics.

The purity of his metaphysical method is further discussed through a distinction between fictions or fabrications (*Erdichtungen*) and hypotheses.^{xxiii} In "fictions" one simply invents a foundation "in a creative or chimaeric fashion."^{xxiv} These fabrications are based upon alleged or

pretended (*angebliche*) experiences (as in ghost stories). Such experiences lack “agreement and uniformity” and are hence “incapable of serving as foundation [*Fundament*] to any law of experience.”^{xxv} Kant opposes these fabrications to the hypotheses used in natural science. In using a hypothesis “one does not invent fundamental forces [*Grundkräfte*]; one rather connects the forces, which one already knows through experience, in a manner which is appropriate to the phenomena.”^{xxvi} While both fictions and hypotheses can be based upon experience, the kind of experiences that can form the foundation of fictions lack agreement and uniformity. Hypotheses, instead, are based upon experiences that are universal and agreed upon, i.e. experiences that can be brought under laws of experience that are “unanimously accepted by the majority of the people.”^{xxvii} Kant thinks here of tangible objects – as opposed to spirits or souls – that can be experienced by everyone and is done so in a uniform manner. Even though everyone can experience objects in different ways, there are certain laws of experience that are universal in the sense that they are accepted by the majority of the people. Kant proclaims his method as starting with these agreed and uniform experiences, followed by the discovery of the fundamental forces as being in harmony with the phenomena given in these experiences. Instead of inventing – or dreaming up – the ground, Kant wants to use hypotheses that are based upon these common experiences. Interestingly, it is not that which is experienced (the sense data) that leads to confusions. Rather the observations are obscured through the presuppositions of reason, which Kant earlier in the “Dreams Essay” calls “delusions of reason.”^{xxviii}

The emphasis on “agreement and uniformity” will prove to be an important step in the direction of the Copernican Revolution, since these universal and agreeable aspects of experiences – instead of the objects experienced – will become the subject of philosophical, or metaphysical, investigation. In the earlier discussed perspectives we found an emphasis on the

“personal” or “individual” role of the spectator. This is a significant change in his thinking that shows a turn from the interest in individual or personal perspectives that can be altered (as in the essay on motion and rest) to an interest in universal (objective) perspectives of the subject. In other words, Kant becomes here interested in human knowledge as such, which can be seen as a prelude to his question concerning the limitations of human knowledge and as a first formulation of his transcendental philosophy. He starts to focus on the universality of experiences, and shifts from objects to subjective structures of knowledge.

Even while Kant’s essay on Swedenborg is still far removed from a transcendental philosophy that is concerned with the possibilities and limitations of human knowledge, we do find a problem in this essay, that will prove to be crucial in the development of his system. This problem pertains to the mistakes of the spirit-seer who confuses the inner and outer world. This problem translates into Kant’s distinction between a material world of objects and the *a priori* world that does not lie in the objects experienced, but in the subject that experiences these objects. One could say, that it is the main objective of Kant’s critical philosophy to make clear distinctions between these two worlds, i.e. to discover the *a priori* principles by separating them from that which is given through experience. The difficulty of this task is that the *a priori* principles cannot be investigated without experience – they are only at work in the act of experiencing. An actual experience, or intuition, is therefore a mix of both sensory data and *a priori* principles. Through the analysis of Swedenborg Kant makes clear that it is the task of philosophy to separate “that which is given” in an experience from the subjective principles that are at work in processing the empirical data of experience.

Towards a Critical Philosophy: The Dissertation

The “Dreams-essay” has introduced us to an important methodological device in which the subjective origins of experience are discovered through experience itself. While the subjective origins (which make experience possible) need to be separated from that which is experienced (the sense data) we can only obtain access to these origins through the act of experiencing. Kant applies this same method in his dissertation of 1770. He, nevertheless, develops a much more systematic approach, first of all, by introducing the forms of time and space as pure subjective principles. Similar to the above-discussed essays the perspective of the observer is playing an active role in determining “that which is observed.” In the “Dreams-essay” Kant already started to emphasize the *a priori* principles and the necessity of hypotheses based upon uniform and agreed experiences. In the dissertation he focuses completely upon those aspects of the observer that are *a priori* and universal to all experience. The main discovery here is that the forms of time and space are pure subjective principles which, so to speak, make it impossible to observe the object in an objective way.

In this work Kant is mainly concerned with the problem of composing a world as a totality out of the compounds that together form this world. Kant’s project is what he calls a “propaedeutic to metaphysics” and a “search for a method”^{xxix} Ultimately, in order to get beyond the status of propaedeutic, his system has to answer the question how the intelligible world of concepts of “the things which exist in themselves”^{xxx} and the sensible world of phenomena are related to one another. While he maintains a distinction between a material and immaterial world, the intelligible world here is – other than in the “Dreams-essay of” 1766 – to be understood as a realm of abstract ideas. The mind is assigned to think or to “entertain” these ideas. The faculty of understanding, on the other hand, has two different uses: the real use in which “the concepts,

whether of things or relations, are given,^{xxxix} and a logical use by which these concepts are “subordinated to each other.”^{xxxix} This logical use subordinates sensitive cognitions to other sensitive cognitions and to concepts. Sensations consist of two parts: matter and form. Matter is the sensation, i.e. the sensory part of the sensation; form is “the aspect [...] of sensible things which arises [...] as the various things which affect the senses are co-ordinated by a certain natural law of the mind.”^{xxxix} This formal aspect that follows a natural law of the mind, which is stable and innate, requires “an internal principle in the mind,”^{xxxix} which brings together the different perceived qualities of an object. This means that objects are not sensed according to “an outline or any kind of schema of the object.”^{xxxix} The sensible representation of the object depends upon “the nature of the subject.”^{xxxix} The object can only be sensed in so far as the subject can be touched by the object. Instead of the object, it is now the way in which the subject can know these objects that becomes the central focus.

The main question in Kant’s dissertation is, how the logical use (which subordinates concepts) and the real use (which provides concepts) of the understanding are related. The difficulty in relating these two uses of the understanding lies in the fact that Kant here still thinks of the genesis of concepts as always being sensitive. Kant states in a cryptic formulation that the concept is not abstracted from the sensitive, but it (actively) abstracts from the sensitive.^{xxxix} This means that it is not the case that concepts are already contained in the sensation (out of which they can be abstracted) but they are, so to speak, developed through a contemplation triggered by sensation. “Sensitive cognitions are subordinated by the logical use of the understanding to other sensitive cognitions.”^{xxxix} Yet their origin or, as Kant writes “genesis” is sensitive: “it is of the greatest importance here to have noticed that cognitions must always be treated as sensitive cognitions, no matter how extensive their logical use of the understanding

may have been in relation to them.^{»xxxix} Concepts are not pre-existing *a priori* principles but rather *a priori* structures that are generated through experience.

We encounter here the main difficulty of the *Dissertation*. Kant attempts to set up a metaphysics that works with *a priori* principles, which are not quite *a priori*, since these concepts are acquired through experience. On the one hand, concepts, such as space and time, are regarded as subjective forms that determine the perception of the object. Space and time are not objective or real; they are not substances, accidents, or relations, but they are subjective and ideal, or pure intuitions of the subject.^{xi} Kant makes here – as we could call it – an important paradigm-shift, as he is not any longer determining the different aspects of the object as pure qualities of the object.^{xli} Instead, the observing subject plays a more important role in determining the qualities of the object. However, the concepts are not yet determined as pure *a priori*. Instead, the *Dissertation* determines space and time as pure intuitions, or formal principles of the sensible world. Space and time are therefore not general concepts – they are not containers or receptacles, as is the case with the representations of the understanding. Instead, they are:

singular intuitions which are nonetheless pure. In these intuitions, the parts, and in particular, the simple parts do not, as the laws of reason prescribe, contain the ground of the possibility of a compound. But, following the paradigm of sensitive intuition, it is rather the case that *the infinite contains the ground* of each *part* which can be thought, and, ultimately, the ground of the simple, or, rather, of *the limit*.^{xlii}

Because of the limitless ground of these concepts they lie beyond the limits of reason. Being such infinite concepts, space and time give a ground to the different parts, i.e. the different

perceptions that necessarily fall under these concepts. Sensitive cognition provides then a basis for the understanding through a concept acquired through experience and reflection or contemplation. The concepts of space and time are thus necessarily acquired through experience, and are at the same time necessary for experience. This vague and problematic correlation between experience and concepts still needs to be elaborated by Kant.

The empirical nature of the *a priori* principles is perhaps Kant's main problem in the pre-critical period, since he is unable to outline a clear relationship between concepts and experience. It is this problem that leads to Kant's "period of silence" in which he does not publish anything for 11 years.^{xliii} Kant refers to the problem in the famous Herz-letter of February 21, 1772 (written during his "period of silence"): "how the faculty of the understanding achieves this conformity with the things themselves is still left in a state of obscurity."^{xliv} The dissertation shows us one of Kant's problems: before the *First Critique* space and time are not considered as *a priori* structures that already exist before any experience as conditions for the possibility of experience, but they are acquired in the process of experience. While in the *First Critique* the acquisition of *a priori* structures through experience is refused (and, accordingly, Kant changes his method) in the dissertation he is led to an ambiguous and problematic conception of the concepts of space and time. On the one hand, space and time are not perceived, but they are added to our perceptions in the process of sensitive cognition. On the other hand, space and time are not innate, but are developed in experience. Although innate laws of the mind join together the different sensations of objects, space and time do not (yet) have this status of being "innate". This means that space and time are neither experienced nor *a priori* structures. This contorted and confusing ambiguity may explain why it took Kant such a long time to finish the *First Critique*. The problem for Kant during this time is not, as has been suggested by others, that

concepts still need to be developed. It is rather the case that a proper method with which these concepts can be given a foundation is lacking.^{xlv} Ultimately, such a foundation will be the transcendental subject.

The significance of the “ambiguous” discussion of space and time is that it brings to the fore the problem Kant was dealing with. The project of setting up a new metaphysics in which the subject is actively bringing concepts “into” objects is here still relying too much on the traditional conception of knowledge. Kant’s problem, in fact, shows how difficult it is – if possible at all – to start from a clean slate, that is, not to be determined by the tradition. The revolution in metaphysics itself has been accomplished in the sense that space and time are determined as subjective structures, but the ground of this subject – as well as the concepts and the relation between the different faculties and uses of the faculties – has yet to be determined.

The *First Critique* and the Completion of the Revolution

Kant’s problem of how exactly the concepts of space and time come into existence is in the *Critique of Pure Reason* resolved by discussing these concepts as pure *a priori* structures. In the dissertation, as discussed above, time and space are acquired through experience and at the same time make experience possible. In the *First Critique* space and time, as well as all other *a priori* concepts still need empirical input in order to create knowledge, or even in order for them to function in the first place. However, the main difference with the dissertation is that the existence of these structures is completely independent from experience, as Kant proposes a subject that possesses *a priori* structures.

The *Critique of Pure Reason* starts with a discussion of *a priori* knowledge in the “Transcendental Aesthetic,” “the science of all principles of *a priori* sensibility.”^{xlvi} Sensibility is

here understood in the same way as in the dissertation: appearances are divided into matter and form, and the understanding is the faculty (1) that thinks the intuitions and (2) from which concepts arise.^{xlvii} In the *First Critique* the forms of space and time are not abstracted in the process of intuition (as in the dissertation). They rather lie *a priori* in the mind as pure forms, i.e. in them is nothing that belongs to sensation. Space and time are neither sensed, nor does the understanding think space and time explicitly, but they are, instead, pure forms of sensibility. These forms, so to speak, order the matter that we receive from the senses.

The purpose of the “Transcendental Aesthetic” is, first of all, to abstract everything the understanding adds through concepts to our sensations, and secondly, to bracket everything which belongs to sensation. After these procedures, only the mere form of appearances remains. Only these purely subjective forms of appearance are of interest to this transcendental method. In this new system Kant establishes the forms of space and time as purely *a priori* subjective principles that exist prior to any experience. The form of space determines relations between objects outside of the subject, and is, therefore, called the form of outer sense. Time is the inner sense “of the intuition of ourselves and of our inner state.”^{xlviii} Time is not dealing with outer appearances but “with the relation of representations in our inner state.”^{xlix} Although space is thus – as opposed to time – an outer sense, since it determines things outside of the subject, it is nevertheless a subjective principle. An important – and famous – result of this is that since both space and time are not objective, but necessary subjective forms, the things in themselves cannot be known as they really are. All objects can only be known as they appear to the subject through the forms of time and space. This does not mean that the objects outside of the subject do not have an existence. It means that things can only be known to us in the way they are meaningful

to us, and that is through the pure forms of space and time. In other words, we cannot know the things outside of these subjective principles.

Besides the forms of space and time Kant distinguishes the concepts of the understanding “which apply *a priori* to objects of intuition”¹ and which are logical functions with which the understanding can make judgments. These pure concepts of the understanding are the categories. One of the most important problems for Kant is how the different faculties and the concepts are united. In the *First Critique* he solves this problem in the idea of the unity of apperception. This idea consists of the “I think” that can accompany all my representations. Kant’s justification of this new system in which the subject exists as a unity can be found in the “Transcendental Deduction” where he argues in favor of the existence of the “I think” The method that we find here is radically different from the “Empirical Deduction” of the *Dissertation*. I cannot discuss all the intricacies of the deduction, but I will focus on the general nature of his method in order to show the radical change in direction Kant takes here.

The “Transcendental Deduction” consists of a number of arguments that seek to establish the necessary origin of all knowledge. The term “deduction” does, for Kant, *not* mean to argue from the general to the particular; *nor* is a “deductive reasoning” an argument in which if the premises are true the conclusion must be true. Instead, Kant borrows the method from the juridical world.ⁱⁱ A legal deduction establishes the validity of right of a legal claim (for example, the right to a certain property). These legal deductions were often set up before an actual conflict arises. They, therefore, do not deal with all kinds of facts and details, but rather determine the origin of certain rights. Similarly Kant wants to establish the validity of the *a priori* origins of knowledge. The Deduction establishes the right to the claim that certain origins of knowledge are entirely *a*

priori. Both the legal writings and Kant's deduction are not full arguments, but rather a preparation for an argument, in the case of a conflict.

In order to validate the usage of the categories in an *a priori* manner, Kant first of all needs to prove that the categories do indeed exist *a priori*, i.e. categories are not constituted through experience (as Kant argued in the pre-critical period, specifically in the dissertation). Instead, the categories form themselves the very possibility for any experience. Even while experience is still an essential part, Kant changes from emphasizing the necessity of experience to emphasizing the *a priori* nature of the categories. In the *First Critique* he, thus, emphasizes that *a priori* concepts are necessary for any meaningful experience. He validates the claim that categories exist *a priori* by arguing for the existence of a subjective origin of all our knowledge: an *a priori* synthetic unity that exists prior to any unity and makes experience possible through the unification of different intuitions and the usage of categories. Kant's deduction as a whole consists of establishing this claim by arguing that if we would not have these *a priori* structures, knowledge would be impossible.

In his dissertation, Kant explained the concepts of the understanding as being generated through experience. In the *First Critique*, Kant still emphasizes the importance of experience: without intuitions or representations the unity of apperception has nothing to accompany or to combine.^{lii} If it cannot combine itself with representations it cannot be active at all. The radical difference with the dissertation is that now all these structures are truly *a priori*: space and time, and the categories are not generated through experience, but are at most – so to speak – awakened through experience. Experience is thus still required for the unity of apperception to reveal itself. In other words, the “I think” cannot think itself (as an analytical unity) without thinking also something other than itself.^{liii} The latter implies that the “I think” thinks itself as a

synthetic unity. This means that it is not an absolute unity that exists independent of experience. Rather, it is a unity in relation to those things it combines.

The “I think” is necessary for an intuition to become an object for me. Further, it is required that a manifold of intuitions through the transcendental unity of apperception “is united in a concept of the object.”^{lv} The transcendental unity makes judgments, and in doing so it uses the categories as logical functions. Categories bring “the manifold of representation (be they intuitions or concepts) under one apperception.”^{lv} Through the categories – which function as rules for the understanding – the manifold of an intuition is brought together. The categories are the logical functions of the understanding, which are independent of sensibility.^{lvi} The categories do apply to objects of experience, but are not involved in intuition. They merely work in the act of combining intuitions as logical functions in judgement.

It is *not* the aim of the deduction to prove the existence of the “I think” as a synthetic unity, but to demonstrate “the *a priori* validity of the categories in respect of all objects of our senses”^{lvii} – the deduction is, after all, entitled “Transcendental Deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding.”^{lviii} Kant argues in the deduction, thus, through the existence of the “I think” for the *a priori* existence of the categories. The main aim of this discussion is to show that intuitions alone are not sufficient to create knowledge. While intuitions are required for knowledge, something else is necessary. A concept, which is not provided in the intuition, but which originates in the subject, is necessary as well. These concepts are ultimately grounded in the “I think” which provides a unity.

The deduction, thus, points us to the foundation of the whole transcendental philosophy: the “I think.” This synthetic unity uses categories in its act of synthesizing the manifold of intuitions into judgments. Kant’s spectator has here truly become a subject. Kant’s subject is a structure of

knowledge – a thinking thing – which observes the objects outside of itself. While the spectators in the earlier works started their observation from particular presuppositions, or hypotheses about the external world, the subject is a universal structure. It is not any longer simply a human being who observes and uses presupposition, and in doing so determines part of the objects observed. Rather, the Kantian subject is determined theoretically in the I think, which provides a unity and the very possibility of all observations. It is striking that these characteristics of the subject are the same issues Kant examined in the pre-critical writings that dealt with the spectator. The Kantian subject is certainly characterized as a spectator who does not merely observe the truth, but is actively determining the truth. The pre-critical writings lack a systematic treatment of the spectator and do not discuss universal but rather some random presuppositions. For that reason the pre-critical writings do not constitute a subject.

The Copernican Revolution

While Kant completes his system in 1781, a reflection on what he has actually accomplished appears 6 years later in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1787. In this preface he introduces the famous idea of a Copernican revolution in metaphysics in which he again discusses a spectator.^{lix} Copernicus' "first hypothesis" was that, instead of "explaining the movements of the heavenly bodies on the supposition that they all revolved round the spectator, he tried whether he might not have better success if he made the spectator to revolve and the stars to remain at rest."^{lx} Similar to Copernicus, Kant has turned the relationships between object and spectator around. While in traditional metaphysics knowledge originates in experience and our intuitions conform to objects, Kant suggests that objects conform to our intuition. Kant presents his own method *as an experiment* inspired by Copernicus' hypothesis.

The subject – the spectator – becomes active, while the object remains at rest. This idea was, in fact, already accomplished in the dissertation of 1770. Yet, what is accomplished in the *First Critique* is a systematic foundation for this idea.

The second preface, however, is indicating an even more radical standpoint. Six years earlier, in the preface of 1781, Kant admits that we cannot know the things themselves, but at least reason can investigate itself and work with pure principles. “ I have made completeness my chief aim, and I venture to assert that there is not a single metaphysical problem which has not been solved, or for the solution of which the key at least has not been supplied.”^{lxi} Here we still find the hope that reason can at least still discover the truth of itself. It is the tribunal of pure reason “which will assure to reason its lawful claims, and dismiss all groundless pretensions.”^{lxii} The second edition preface takes on a completely different tone in this regard. Kant here namely recognizes that reason finds only what it is looking for. Using several scientific discoveries as examples, he states “reason has insight only into that which it produces after a plan of its own.”^{lxiii} Scientific discoveries only occur after certain experiments that already start with certain presupposition. It is true that “reason must approach nature in order to be taught by it.”^{lxiv} Yet, reason “must not do so in the character of a pupil who listens to everything that the teacher chooses to say, but of an appointed judge who compels the witness to answer questions which he has himself formulated.”^{lxv} While Kant in the first edition describes reason as a tribunal^{lxvi} in the second edition reason has stepped down to the level of a judge that can be taught by nature. While the tribunal of the first edition seems to find the truth, the judge of the second edition is limited: it only discovers those things s/he asks questions about and does not find anything outside of the things s/he is investigating. While presuppositions seem limiting, those are also necessary, since without a hypothesis reason is not observing at all. Without an idea of what it is

looking for, reason cannot organize the data it receives from the senses in any meaningful way. This implies that reason always starts from a theory before the actual observation occurs. Theories and hypotheses do not originate from that which is observed, but the observations are organized and given meaning in the context of a theory. Within this framework a revolution in metaphysics then involves a new hypothesis from which we start our investigations. As such, reason can observe from a different perspective. The Copernican revolution is precisely this proposal for a change of perspective, in which the formal structures of knowledge itself become the object of knowledge.

In 1787 Kant has recognized the limitations to the idea that reason is a spectator. Reason does not only use hypotheses in observing the world outside of itself. Rather, any observation, including the observation of itself, starts from hypotheses. Since reason observes itself also through hypotheses, it is impossible to observe itself in an objective way. What we are left with is the possibility to change the hypotheses, and the Copernican Revolution is exactly that: an experiment that attempts to explain reality with a new set of concepts. To introduce the subject as an active component, while leaving the objects at rest, is an experiment that might make it easier to explain reality as it appears to us.

The complications of the revolution come to the fore in § 24 in the B-Deduction where Kant discusses a paradox. Inner sense, time, does not only represent objects as they appear to us, Kant explains, but also we ourselves are represented through inner sense, and hence I appear to myself in a passive way: not as I am in myself, but how I am for myself, i.e. how I appear to myself, mediated through the form of inner sense. In doing so, I perform an act upon myself, in which I remain passive.^{lxvii} Hence, “[w]e know our own subject only as appearance, not as it is in itself.”^{lxviii}

The conclusion that we cannot obtain objective knowledge of ourselves, is to be regarded as a necessary and ultimate result of the development of the role of the subject as a spectator. Nothing outside of this spectator can be really known, but also this spectator itself can only be observed with its own “eyes.” Even while the subject can change its hypotheses from which its observations start, such a change will never get beyond the realm of experiments. For, a hypothesis can never overcome its status as hypothesis. It always remains a particular perspective of the spectator. Hence also the structures of knowing discussed in the *First Critique* form merely a hypothesis, even while it is hypothesized that these are universal and can be found in every human being.

Conclusion

In this paper I have analyzed Kant’s development of the subject starting in his pre-critical writings and into the *First Critique*. We have seen how Kant initially focuses upon the role the spectator plays in determining observed objects. While this role of the spectator is playing a crucial role in the idea of the transcendental subject, it has also become clear that Kant’s thinking encountered many obstacles in developing the subject as an active unity that determines the objects it observes. The idea of an observer who changes perspectives is simply put not radical enough and throughout the *Dissertation* Kant remains – against his wish – too much involved in the kind of metaphysics that he wants to overcome. While he regards the subject as a spectator, objectivity outside of the subject is still too prevalent in the pre-critical writings. It is the idea of the “I think” and the *a priori* concepts that can eventually let Kant formulate his new philosophy.

The development that I have analyzed in this paper has several important consequences. First of all, we can recognize how Kant was continually searching for a new system that could

revolutionize the way we grasp ourselves in relation to the objects we know. While the ideas of this revolution were certainly materialized at the time of his *Dissertation*, the theoretical foundation for those ideas needed much more time. Secondly, Kant's notion of the unity of apperception is an important part of the answer to his theoretical problems. The "I think" brings a unity which founds the observing subject, and in doing so actively determines that which is observed. The most important idea of this unity is that it is presupposed *a priori*; it is not constituted by experience, as Kant (following the tradition) was initially thinking. Thirdly, Kant in the second preface of the *First Critique* recognizes the limitations of his revolution in metaphysics. By determining the subject as an active component in the act of knowing, the subject is also active in determining itself. With that recognition – the ultimate result of the Copernican Revolution – Kant has to admit that we cannot find the truth and leave the errors of the past behind, but that we can only make attempts at explaining reality in a better manner than we did before.

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Werkmeister, W.H. (1980), *Kant: The Architectonic and Development of his Philosophy*, Open Court Publishing Company, La Salle and London.

ⁱ I will use the following abbreviations for works published in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*.

Correspondence = Kant, I (1999), Correspondence, Arnulf Zweig (tr. and ed.), *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, New York.

Dreams = Kant, I (1999) ‘Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics’ in: *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755 - 1770*, David Walford (tr. and ed.) The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, New York. In the page references the second number refers to the *Akademie Ausgabe*.

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ⁱⁱ Frederick Beiser, for example, writes that “from the very beginning of his career Kant was concerned with the foundation and limits of knowledge” Beiser 1992: 36.

ⁱⁱⁱ Werkmeister points out that in the “Dreams-Essay” Kant argues that “metaphysical speculations are worthless and, in effect, a waste of time, unless we first develop an adequate epistemological basis and a dependable method for philosophical inquiries” Werkmeister 1980: 45.

^{iv} Only the “Dissertation” is considered to be a first formulation of the Copernican Revolution. Beck, for example writes that the dissertation “contains the first stage of the Copernican

Revolution: objects appear to us by conformity to the sensitive conditions of our experience of them” Beck 1989: 23.

^v Descartes 1993: 13 / 18

^{vi} Ibid. 14 / 18.

^{vii} Subjecting previous thoughts to doubt is perhaps one of the most significant characteristics of modernity, the age in which every scientific discovery reduces earlier times to mere idiocy.

^{viii} My own translation of : “aller erlernten Begriffe vergessen zu machen und den Weg zur Wahrheit ohne einen andern Führer als die blosse gesunde Vernunft von selber anzutreten.” Kant 1922: 18.

^{ix} (My own translation of:) “Nun kann ich einen Körper in Beziehung auf gewisse äußere Gegenstände, die ihn zunächst umgeben, betrachten, und denn werde ich, wenn er diese Beziehung nicht ändert, sagen, er ruhe.” Kant 1922: 18

^x This example is probably inspired by Aristotle’s discussion of a boat in a river in which the river is determined as moving (Aristotle 1998: 212a).

^{xi} My own translation of the following: “Bald darauf sehe ich aus dem Schiffe nach dem Ufer hin und merke, daß das Tau, womit es befestiget war, aufgeknüpft sei, und das Schiff langsam den Strom herabtreibe; ich sage alsbald: die Kugel bewegt sich und zwar von Morgen gegen Abend nach der Richtung des Flusses“ Kant 1922: 18.

^{xii} Kant 1922: 19.

^{xiii} Also Aristotle discusses the movement of the celestial bodies, just after the example of the ship.

^{xiv} Kant 1922: 18.

^{xv} *Dreams*: 316 / Ak 2: 329.

^{xvi} *Dreams*: 319 / Ak 2: 332.

^{xvii} *Dreams*: 349 / Ak 2: 363.

^{xviii} *Dreams*: 350 / Ak 2: 363.

^{xix} *Dreams*: 348/9 / Ak 2:362.

^{xx} *Dreams*: 345 / Ak 2: 359.

^{xxi} *Dreams*: 344 / Ak 2:358. Walford translates “reinen, abgesonderten Betrachtungen” with “pure, abstract observations,” missing the crucial distinction Kant makes here between observations and contemplations, i.e. the work of the senses and the work of reason. Here he is clearly talking about the latter. Kant also emphasizes here that the contemplations are not yet put together. “Abgesondert” can mean here either that the contemplations are secluded from sensible observations, or that the contemplations are secluded from one another and not yet put into a complete theory.

^{xxii} This distinction between *a priori* principles and *a posteriori* ends is related to the confusion of the inner and the outer world by the spirit-seer Swedenborg. He namely has already a complete theory when starting with his observations of the spirits. This is not a trick in order to deceive the reader, but he is rather misleading his own observations. Instead of starting with an *a posteriori* end in his *a priori* contemplations (the strategy of Kant’s colleagues), Swedenborg makes observations without any *a priori* contemplations. This causes him to confuse the inner and the outer world, and this leads to mistakes in his observations.

^{xxiii} *Dreams*: 357 / 2:371.

^{xxiv} *Ibid.*

^{xxv} *Dreams*: 358 / Ak 2:372.

^{xxvi} *Dreams*: 357 / Ak 2:371.

^{xxvii} *Dreams*: 358 / Ak 2:372.

^{xxviii} *Dreams*: 347 / Ak 2:361.

^{xxix} *Dissertation*: 415 / Ak 2:419.

^{xxx} *Dissertation*: 391 / Ak 2:398.

^{xxxi} *Dissertation*: 385 / Ak 2:393.

^{xxxii} *Ibid.*

^{xxxiii} *Dissertation*: 384 / Ak 2: 392/3.

^{xxxiv} *Dissertation*: 385 / Ak 2:393.

^{xxxv} *Ibid.*

^{xxxvi} *Ibid.*

^{xxxvii} *Dissertation*: 386 / Ak 2: 394.

^{xxxviii} *Dissertation*: 385 / Ak 2: 393.

^{xxxix} *Dissertation*: 385 / Ak 2: 393.

^{xl} *Dissertation*: 393/7 / Ak 2: 400 (time) / Ak 2: 403 (space).

^{xli} Kant still employs what he later determines as an “empirical deduction,” which traces the origin of an object in experience. The method used in his *Dissertation* is the method of abstracting the *a priori* principles from what is empirically given. This method is rejected in the *First Critique* when he distinguishes an empirical deduction and a transcendental deduction. An empirical deduction, “shows the manner in which a concept is acquired through experience and through reflection upon experience” (Kant 1965: 121 / A 85). This is a description of Kant’s own method in the *Dissertation* (as well as the “Dreams-essay”).

^{xlii} *Dissertation*: 399 / Ak 2: 405.

^{xliii} The next work after publishing the *Dissertation* in 1770 is the *First Critique* (1781). While one could argue that such a work requires at least 11 years of work, the fact of the matter is that Kant writes Marcus Herz on several occasions that he is almost finished with his project: he hopes to finish by Easter 1774 (in a letter written toward the end of 1773), in the summer of 1777 (November 24, 1776), “this summer” (Early April 1778), and “soon” (August 28, 1778).

Correspondence 139-169 / AK 10:143 – 10:241.

^{xliv} *Correspondence*, 134 / Ak 10: 121.

^{xlv} I agree in this regard with Paul Guyer, who writes that in the dissertation and the period “up to 1770 [Kant] had not simply overlooked the problem of the categories; rather he just did not know how to solve it” (Guyer 1992: 128). Lewis White Beck, on the other hand, claims that the issue in the dissertation is not “how a priori concepts must be applicable to sensible objects” (the problem of the *First Critique*) but rather “how there can be a priori knowledge of *intelligibilia* without intellectual intuition” (Beck 1989: 22). I agree that the latter is a problem, but Beck does not seem willing to admit that there is a problem with the concepts already in the dissertation. I argue here that Kant can only find a solution to “the problem of the concepts” by turning to the question “how a priori concepts must be applicable to sensible objects.” Kant’s solution is to take the concepts as pure a priori.

^{xlvi} Kant 1965: 66 / A 21.

^{xlvii} Kant 1965: 65 / A 19.

^{xlviii} Kant 1965: 77 / A33.

^{xlix} *Ibid.*

¹ Kant 1965: 113 / A79 / B105.

^{li} For a discussion of the legal Deduktionsschriften (“Deduction writings”) and Kant’s use of this legal method, See Henrich 1989: 29-46.

^{lii} Kant 1965: B 135.

^{liii} An analytic unity requires or presupposes a synthetic unity. In note *a* of B133/4 Kant gives the example of an analytic unity, “red in general” which can only be represented by thinking a red object, i.e. by combining “red” with other representations. The unity of the ‘I think’ can similarly only be thought through combination with other representations. I can think only this analytic unity “by means of a presupposed possible synthetic unity” (Kant 1965: 154 / B 133, note a).

^{liv} Kant 1965: 157 / B139.

^{lv} Kant 1965: 160 / B 143.

^{lvi} Kant 1965: 160 / B 144.

^{lvii} Kant 1965: 161 / B 145.

^{lviii} Kant 1965: 151 / B 129.

^{lix} One could argue that the spectator remains an important topic for Kant throughout his philosophy. The idea that the subject is spectator who is central and not a passive observer can, for example, also be found in *Der Streit der Facultäten* (1798) where the enthusiasm in the observer is more important than what happens on the stage of history.

^{lx} Kant 1965: 22 / B xvi/xvii.

^{lxi} Kant 1965: 10 / A xiii.

^{lxii} Kant 1965: 9 / A xi/xii.

^{lxiii} Kant 1965: 20 / B xiii

^{lxiv} Ibid.

^{lxv} Ibid.

^{lxvi} Kant 1965: 9 / Axii.

^{lxvii} Kant 1965: 165 / B152.

^{lxviii} Kant 1965: 168 / B156.