

Kantian Aspects

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An aspectival interpretation of the transcendental distinction

	distinction	core thesis	link
methodological	ways of considering	only knowledge-under-a-description	Gestalt switch
phenomenalist	mental vs. non-mental things	only self-knowledge	representing
property-dualist	types of properties	knowledge only of how we are affected	co-exemplification
aspectival	aspect and base	knowledge only of aspects	aspect-of

Two seemingly contradictory desiderata:

knowledge transmitting To know the appearance is to know, in a certain sense, that which appears.
cognitively encapsulating Information about the appearance is not information about the thing in itself.

A Kantian answer?

Aspectival knowledge Knowing that a is F is to know, of a , that it has an appearance-aspect that is F , i.e. it is to know that a appears-to-be- F .

Knowledge of aspects Knowing that a is F is to know, of the appearance-aspect of a , that it is F , i.e. it is to know that a -as-it-appears is F .

The concept HORSE problem

Here, again, are the inferences under discussion. One inference we certainly do not want is the *secundum quid ad simpliciter* fallacy:

$$\frac{G(a \text{ qua } F)}{Ga} \text{ A}$$

In Kantian terms, **A** is the inference ascribed to noologists, such as Leibniz, who speak of things in themselves as if they were appearances.

Aspects are introduced because they have new properties, i.e. properties that they do not share with their bases:

$$\frac{G(a \text{ qua } F)}{Fa} \text{ B}$$

B, however, has some attractions: for one thing, it constrains what aspects there are and explains, e.g., why there is no such thing as Socrates insofar as he is not self-identical. Could **B** be accepted for some subclass of properties G ?

$$\frac{G(a \text{ qua } F)}{F(a \text{ qua } F)} \text{ C}$$

We can talk not just of aspects, but of their bases too, at least negatively:

I am not an aspect.

(I **qua** not being an aspect) exist/exists.

(1) (I **qua** not being an aspect) is/am not an aspect.

(2) (I **qua** not being an aspect) is/am an aspect.

(1) is sanctioned by (C), (2) motivated by the claim that, if it were false, it would appear quite mysterious how we can talk about aspects at all.

Appearances as representations

An appearance is the “undetermined object of an empirical intuition”. Within the domain of the knowable, and whenever there is sensation, representing and appearing are converse relations: to say that x represents y is to say that y appears to x . Moreover, they are also correlative: what y is represented as is what y appears as. One and the same aspect is both an aspect of the representation and an aspect of the appearance: the representing and the appearing thing share the aspect by which they are given to us.

If appearances are representations, can they still be aspects of things in themselves? Yes, if we qualify the former claim and take appearances only event-wise, not result-wise to be representations:

process the processes of appearing and of representing are different – they differ in their direction, and in what they are grounded in: things appear in virtue of how they are, while subjects represent in virtue of how they are and these grounds are different in the case of the representation of mind-independent matters of fact;

event the two processes may still coincide, and thus be the same event: every appearing is then also a being represented, and every representing also a being appeared to: it is in virtue of such coincidence that these events make available the same information, and reveal the same aspect of the world;

result the one event that is both adequately described as “ x appears to y as F ” and “ x is represented as F by y ” may still have two different results, and modify its two relata in two different ways: as a dancing ‘produces’ both a dancer and a dance, an event of representing/appearing produces both an appearance and a representation.

That we cannot know things in themselves on the basis of how they appear to us does not, however, entail that we do not know them at all. We do know about them, as Bxxvi makes clear, how they appear to us. Kant says in the footnote to B70 that it is the things in themselves that appear to us and that how they appear to us (“die Prädikate der Erscheinungen”) can be attributed to the “Objekte selbst [...] in Verhältnis auf unseren Sinn”.¹ While we cannot cognize them as such, we still must be able to think things in themselves, for they are conceptually linked to their aspects: “Denn sonst würde der ungereimte Satz daraus folgen, dass Erscheinung ohne etwas wäre, was da erscheint.” (B xxvi-xxvii)

A parenthesis on looks

The Analytic

Kant’s transcendental deduction of the concepts SPACE and TIME is laconically brief:

1. “The predicates of appearance can be attributed to the object in itself, in relation to our sense ...” (Kant 1998: 190).

...da nur vermittelst solcher reiner Formen der Sinnlichkeit uns ein Gegenstand erscheinen, d.i. ein Objekt der empirischen Anschauung sein kann, so sind Raum und Zeit reine Anschauungen, welche die Bedingungen der Möglichkeit der Gegenstände als Erscheinungen a priori enthalten, und die Synthesis in denselben hat objektive Gültigkeit. (A89, B121-122)²

The problem is that we need an interpretation of “die Möglichkeitsbedingung von x enthalten” substantial enough to imply “auf x zutreffen”. The quoted argument proceeds as follows:

- (a) all our possible representations of objects represent them as being in time
- (b) time is a form of pure intuition / only in time can things appear to us
- (c) TIME applies to all things that we can represent

But the step from (b) to (c) is not automatic: that things necessarily appear to us temporally does not imply that they are temporal unless, of course, it is presupposed that they appear to us the way they are. If we think of (a) as guaranteeing the truth of this extra premiss, we commit the Kantian fallacy. The crucial step is from (1) to (2):

1. to cognize something as an object (etwas als einen Gegenstand erkennen) is (to cognize it) through the representation (Vorstellung) x
2. x is a priori determining (a priori bestimmt) *in Ansehung* of the object

According to Kant, the inference is valid and is also sound for $x = \{ \text{SPACE, TIME, categories} \}$. The aesthetics establishes (1) for $x = \{ \text{SPACE, TIME} \}$ with respect to the cognition which is Anschauung. The deduction to (2) is then as follows:

Mit dieser formalen Bedingung der Sinnlichkeit [dass wir Anschauung davon haben können] stimmen also alle Erscheinungen notwendig überein, weil sie durch dieselbe erscheinen, d.i. empirisch angeschaut und gegeben werden können. (A93 / B125)³

Again, we cannot infer that a necessary condition of our cognition of some object is a condition of that object unless the object is itself some x -qua-cognised. The property-dualism interpretations does not provide warrant for this inference: even if their spatial and temporal properties are extrinsic, relational, dispositional, response-dependent or in other ways ‘secondary’, it does not follow from that fact that we have to attribute them to the objects of cognition that these objects in fact have them. In effect, they attribute to him the following reasoning from **P** to **C**, informally known as ‘the Kantian fallacy’:

- P** We only know things if they affect us.
C We only know things as they affect us.

The inference is from a necessary condition of (our possessing, or entertaining) a representation to the content of that representation. By the factivity of knowledge, the metaphysical conclusion follows: things as they affect us are all the things we can know, and, for all we know, are all the things there are. The inference is, of course, invalid, and obviously so: there are many necessary conditions for our knowing anything that do not constrain *what* we can know – why should ‘affection’ be any different?

My own positive proposal is restricting the quantifier in **P**, but not to properties, but to property-defined things, i.e. aspects:

- P5** We only know of things that they have the aspects to affect us.

2. “For since an object can appear to us only by means of such pure forms of sensibility, i.e., be an objecta of empirical intuition, space and time are thus pure intuitions that contain a priori the conditions of the possibility of objects as appearances, and the synthesis in them has objective validity.” (Kant 1998: 222)

3. “All appearances therefore necessarily agree with this formal condition of sensibility [that under which alone objects can be intuited], because only through it can they appear, i.e., be empirically intuited and given.” (Kant 1998: 224)

C5 We only know of things-as-they-affect-us.

Is this inference valid? I think it is, if C5 is supplemented by an account of how things relate to things-as-they-affect-us. To do so while preserving a sense in which C5 is an expression of transcendental idealism is one task of a theory of aspects. Is the inference sound? This will depend on what account is given of what P5 means by ‘knowing of something that it has an aspect’.

0.1 Aspects in the amphiboly

The noumena/phaenomena contrast is applied to representations (Vorstellungen) and more particularly to concepts (Begriffe) in the amphiboly of Reflexionsbegriffe. Transcendental reflection there reveals that conceptually based relations between things differ relative to our ground of having these concepts (“der Erkenntnisart, zu der [die Begriffe] gehören”, A 261 / B 317). Depending on the ground (Erkenntnisart / Erkenntniskraft) of the concepts and the source (Erkenntnisquelle) of the Vorstellungen and the Erkenntnisvermögen wherein they “belong together”, there may be (i) different intrinsically indiscernibles, (ii) real contrariety, (iii) ungrounded dispositions and (iv) form that determines, but is not determined by matter. There are thus four contrasts between noumena and phenomena, corresponding to the four pairs of concepts of reflexion:

1. Intrinsically indiscernible things that “als Gegen[ä]nde des reinen Verstandes [gelten]” are identical (A 263 / B 319), while also only extrinsically discernible phaenomena (that are, e.g., located in different places) are distinct.⁴
Compared as noumena (and hence in abstraction from their location), two intrinsically indiscernible drops of water are identical; compared as phaenomena, the difference of their locations grounds their non-identity.
2. Parts of reality (Realitäten) as “nur durch den reinen Verstand vorgestellt” cannot be contrary to each other (im Widerstreit), while things that are real “in der Erscheinung” may (A 264 / B 320). Being in harmony with each other, however, means different things with respect to representations and to things represented: for concepts, not being in harmony or being contrary is being logically contradictory (A 272 / B 328); for things, it is to cancel out the other thing’s effects. Such a “wechselseitiger Abbruch” happens, e.g., with two diametrically opposed and equally strong forces acting on the same point.
3. All intrinsic properties of objects of pure reason (“Gegenstände des reinen Verstandes”) are not really relational (ie. do not stand in relations “dem Dasein nach”), while intrinsic properties of spatial phaenomena all are.⁵ An intrinsic determination of a thing in itself cannot be the concept of a relation, not even of a relation between its parts: because things in themselves need to have an intrinsic nature, they must therefore be simple. Determinations of phaenomena, by contrast, may be only comparatively intrinsic, ie. be exemplified in virtue of how the things is by itself (independently of the existence of things wholly disjoint with it), but still be had in virtue of properties of and relations between its parts. With noumena, extrinsic discernibility presupposes numerical non-identity, while the numerical non-identity of phaenomena may consist in such a difference of external relations (“die Verschiedenheit der äusseren Verhältnisse [macht] eine Verschiedenheit der Sachen selbst [aus]”, A 280 / B 336).
4. With respect to pure concepts of reason, matter, as that which is determined, precedes the form that determines it and makes it possible. Reason needs matter, at least conceptual matter (“dass etwas gegeben sei (wenigstens im Begriffe)”, A 267 / B 323), before it can impose form (e.g. by combining

4. Kant conceptualises the intrinsic indiscernibility of two things as *identity* of their (complete) concepts and claims that in the case of noumena, identity of things is implied by identity of concepts.

5. The claim is indeed this sweeping: “die inneren Bestimmungen einer substantia phaenomenon im Raume [sind] nichts als Verhältnisse, und sie selbst ganz und gar ein Inbegriff von lauter Relationen” (A 265 / B 321).

concepts into judgements). With respect to intuition and its objects, however, form precedes matter and makes it – as a phenomenon, ie. object of an intuition – possible.

We thus have the following claims:

identity/difference V_1 and V_2 are representations of droplets:

- if V_1 and V_2 are intellectual:** $\square(R(V_1))$ is identical_R to $R(V_2)$: $\leftrightarrow V_1$ is the same concept as V_2
- if V_1 and V_2 are intuitive:** $\diamond(R(V_1))$ is not identically_R to $R(V_2) \wedge R(V_1)$ is intrinsically indiscernible to $R(V_2)$)

harmony/repugnance V_1 and V_2 are representations of contrary emotions (pleasure and pain):

- if V_1 and V_2 are intellectual:** $\square(R(V_1))$ is in harmony_R with $R(V_2)$: $\leftrightarrow V_1$ is logically consistent with V_2)
- if V_1 and V_2 are intuitive:** $\diamond(R(V_1))$ is not in harmony_I with $R(V_2) \wedge R(V_1)$ cancels out the effects $R(V_2))$

inner/outer V_1 is the representation of a determination of x .

- if V_1 is intellectual:** $\square(R(V_1))$ is an intrinsic_R determination of x : $\leftrightarrow V_1$ is a non-relational concept)
- if V_1 is intuitive:** $\diamond(R(V_1))$ is an intrinsic_I determination of $x \wedge R(V_1)$ is a relation between parts of x)

form/matter V_1 and V_2 are any representations whatsoever:

- if V_1 and V_2 are intellectual:** $\square(R(V_1))$ is the form_R of $R(V_2)$: $\leftrightarrow V_2$ makes V_1 possible)
- if V_1 and V_2 are intuitive:** $\diamond(R(V_1))$ is the form_I of $R(V_2) \wedge R(V_1)$ makes $R(V_2)$ possible)

The left-hand sides of the biconditionals have to be taken with a grain of salt: strictly speaking, all positive claims we can make about noumena are in reality claims about their concepts; we can only ‘reflect logically’ and determine relations between their concept:

Wenn wir bloss logisch reflektieren, so vergleichen wir lediglich unsere Begriffe unter einander im Verstande, ob beide dasselbe enthalten [identity_R], ob sie sich widersprechen oder nicht [harmony_R], ob etwas in dem Begriffe innerlich enthalten sei, oder zu ihm hinzukomme [intrinsic_R], und welcher von beiden gegeben, welcher aber nur als eine Art, den gegebenen zu denken, gelten soll [form_R]. (A 279 / B 335)

Property-dualist interpretations have a major problem, it seems to me, to make sense of Kant’s unequivocal assertion that Leibniz’s principle of the identity of indiscernibles holds of “concepts of things as such” (“von Begriffen der Dinge überhaupt gilt”, A 272 / B 328):

...wenn ich einen Tropfen Wasser als ein Ding an sich selbst nach allen seinen innern Bestimmungen kenne, so kann ich keinen derselben von dem anderen für verschieden gelten lassen, wenn der ganze Begriff desselben mit ihm einerlei ist. Ist er aber Erscheinung im Raume, so hat er seinen Ort nicht bloss im Verstande (unter Begriffen), sondern in der sinnlichen äusseren Anschauung (im Raume), und da sind die physischen Örter, in Ansehnung der inneren Bestimmungen der Dinge, ganz gleichgültig...(A 272 / B 328)

Kant here says that the very same droplet of water may be known as a thing by itself and also be a phenomenon in space. This already rules out an interpretation of aspects as sets or bundles of properties. If the noumenon / phenomenon distinction were one between properties, then there is no sense available in which one and the same thing can be known, be or be considered as both a noumenon and a phenomenon.

The assertion that the PII holds of noumena but not of phenomena straightforwardly implies that there may be one noumenon and two phenomena that correspond to it – but we cannot understand how one thing may have two bundles of mind-dependent properties while only having one bundle of mind-independent

properties. According to Kant, intrinsically similar noumena are identical, while numerically different phaenomena may differ only extrinsically. This means that it is not possible for two things to have their noumenal properties in common, but to differ in their phenomenal properties. Two ways out for the property dualist:

- PII holds (only) of *phenomena* considered as noumena, not of noumena: the two water droplets considered as noumena are identical, even though they are really (as the phenomena they are) different;
- Phenomena cannot differ just in their phenomenal properties: if they differ at all, then they must differ with respect to a noumenal property as well.

Kant, however, really does seem to say that that mere extrinsic difference suffices for non-identity of phenomena, but not of noumena, ie. that the aspects are different even though they are aspects of the same basis.

There is a further, more important problem here for property-dualist interpretations. If we interpret Kant's claim that the PII holds of noumena as asserting that commonality of noumenal (intrinsic, categorical, response-independent) properties suffices for identity, then his claim that it does *not* hold of phenomena is illogical nonsense: if two things sharing their noumenal properties are *already* identical, then there are no two things for the phenomenal properties to differentiate. This follows from the the indiscernibility of identicals.

There is no such a problem for an aspect interpretation, on the other hand. The very same thing *a*, in itself, may have two aspects, e.g. *a*-qua-being-here and *a*-qua-being-there. To take two water droplets located in different places to be one and the same is to viciously abstract from their aspectival diversity. This corresponds well with Kant's own gloss on the matter. Leibniz's mistake to take the indiscernibility of identicals to hold not just of noumena, but of phenomena as well, is put in terms of forgetting about what was abstracted from:

Weil aber bei dem blossen Begriffe von irgend einem Dinge von manchen notwendigen Bedingungen einer Anschauung abstrahiert worden, so wird, durch eine sonderbare Übereilung, das, wovon abstrahiert wird, dafür genommen, dass es überall nicht anzutreffen sei, und dem Dinge nichts eingeräumt, als was in seinem Begriffe enthalten ist. (A 281 / B 337-338)

Kant says here that Leibniz, thinking to be able to sensibly talk about noumena, abstracted from the extrinsic (i.e. spatio-temporal) properties that may distinguish intrinsically identical phenomena, took them to be non-existent and thus inferred the identity of things from the identity of their concepts. He mistook, in other words, aspects for their bases.

0.2 What we know about noumena

Kant does think, however, that we do know things about how the world is in itself:

...if we remove our own subject or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, then all constitution, all relations of objects in space and time, indeed space and time themselves, would disappear. (A 42/B 59; A 26/B 42; A 32?3/B 49).

This is a puzzling claim.

Consider the following argument in favour of the two-world view:⁶

*P*₁ The objects of outer experience have the property of being necessarily spatial.

6. Setiya (2004: 67) ascribes this argument to Guyer (1987: 362–367), though I find in these pages a different argument, to be discussed below.

*P*₂ Noumena do not have the property of being necessarily spatial.

C Hence no object of outer experience is a noumenon and vice versa.

The aspect-interpretation I advocate has no problem in accepting the conclusion: the left-to-right half then says that no aspect we experience is a noumenon and that we experience only aspects. The first follows already from the distinctness of aspects and their basis, the second from the analysis of our experience as being conditioned by the forms of pure intuition: every object of our experience is experienced as spatiotemporal, at least. The right-to-left half says that no noumenon is an aspect we experience. If noumena are bases: they then cannot be aspects.

If noumena are aspects as well, however, we need an explanation why we cannot experience these aspects. This explanation is not as straightforward as it may seem. Why would it not be possible to experience *a*-qua-nonspatiotemporal *as* spatiotemporal? Such an experience, of course, would not be veridical and even necessarily so, but why think that it is not possible?

o.3 The Dialectic

The whole of the dialectic should give an indirect argument for transcendental idealism (so it's not a *reductio* proof, but a *Auflösung von Schwierigkeiten*) – so we need independent arguments why the paralogisms are fallacious, the antinomies only apparent and what's wrong with the ideals. In aspect-terminology, we get the following diagnosis: that in each case we consider something as an aspect which is not an aspect, but a thing in itself – we think we are talking about appearances (and hence making justifiable knowledge claim), but this is just transcendental illusion:

paralogisms : we consider things in so far as they are the bases of their aspects (*a* qua base is not an aspect (but *a*))

antinomies : we consider things in so far they have all their properties (*a* qua its nature is not an aspect (but *a*))

ideals : we consider things in so far as they have aspects at all (*a* qua having aspects is not an aspect (but *a*))

In a paralogism, we infer, categorically, a claim about appearances from a claim about how we have to think about things in themselves. For the first paralogism, e.g., the diagnosis becomes: it is true that I must think of myself as a thinking thing, but I cannot therefrom infer that I am a substance, for ‘must be thought as subject’ implies ‘is a substance’ only among appearances; if it were true that I am given to myself as a thinking thing, then it would follow that I as appearance am a substance, but nothing would follow about how I am by myself.

Whereas the amphiboly argued that we affirm principles that are true of things in themselves falsely also of appearances, thinking that appearances must obey the same conditions of thinkability as things in themselves, the antinomies show how we get into difficulties if we assume that we can know appearances intellectually (i.e. in the way things in themselves could be known by non-discursive minds). In an antinomy, we infer, hypothetically, a claim about the totality of appearances from a claim about each appearance. In this way, we form the the idea “world”, the “transcendental idea of the absolute totality in the series of conditions”, that has no empirical reality. We use the idea “world” to extend the application of the categories (transforming them into concepts of reason [Vernunftbegriffe]):

quantity the aggregative totality of all times (past and present), the totality of space (arrived at by successive consideration)

quality the divisive totality of partitions of matter

relation the totality of causes

modality the totality of conditions

Ideas of these totalities transcend the empirical use of human cognition, because

- we can represent temporal intervals and spatial regions only as proper parts of intervals and regions that properly contain them: they are finite because they are bounded;
- we can represent extended things only as divisible: they are extended because they are complex;
- we can represent causes only as themselves effects: it is the full cause because it contains all causal conditions;
- we can represent reasons only themselves explained: it is the full explanation because it contains everything relevant

In all four cases, reason takes the world to contain the totality of the necessary conditions, which, however, is not “sensually possible” (*sinnlich möglich*) (“*sinnlich möglich*”, A417/B444).

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