

Towards “the perfection of all culture”: Reflections on the ‘B-Deduction’ in Kant’s
Critique of Pure Reason

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Introduction:

This critical exposition of the philosophical gist of the ‘Transcendental Deduction (B)’ in Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* will examine three enduring thematic questions in Kantian scholarship. First, how does the ‘B-Deduction’ (1787) of the *Critique* differ from the ‘A-Deduction’ (1781)? Second, why does Kant begin the ‘B-Deduction’ with a central question that attests to his philosophical grounds of concern and motivation, but then progresses and finally ends the Deduction with a conclusion that seems like an answer to an entirely different fundamental question? Third, being that the *Critique of Pure Reason* over the course of the last two centuries has emerged as one of the most influential yet puzzling books in the history of philosophy, what exactly is the role of Kant’s ‘Transcendental Deduction (B)’ within his overarching philosophical project(s) employed in the tome? To examine these three thematic questions, I couple a detailed reading of the ‘B-Deduction’ with key observations and assertions made by two sets of philosophic commentators. The first set of commentators is comprised of three very recent and highly respected major figures in Kantian scholarship (Kenny; Pinkard; Scruton). The second set is composed of two ‘heavyweights’ of twentieth-century continental philosophy (Adorno; Heidegger) that straddle two of its most important schools of thought (Critical Theory; Phenomenology). The latter set’s landmark accounts of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and its ‘B-Deduction’ are especially insightful because they reveal how Kant’s critical thought endured and influenced one particularly important methodology of philosophy and its rival schools of thought over the course of time.

I: How the 'B-Deduction' differs from the 'A-Deduction'.

To understand how the 'B-Deduction' of the *Critique of Pure Reason* differs from the original 'A-Deduction', it helps to consider Immanuel Kant's motives for revising the 'Preface' in the 'B Edition' (1787). After the First Edition (A) of the First *Critique* was released in 1781, Kant gained some amount of notoriety (as far as one particular review of his book is concerned, that being the Garve/Feder¹) as 'the Continent's' new George 'Berkeley'². Kant was deeply troubled by his initial audience's misunderstanding of the First *Critique*. His aims were to develop and pursue a type of 'transcendental idealism' in full-fledged philosophic modernity, opposed to perpetuating the traditional idealism that preceded him in early-modern philosophy³. When Kant rewrote the 'Preface' in the First *Critique*'s 'B Edition', he responded to his critics and made a clarification in his aims and intentions, calling for the study of philosophy to resemble the pursuit of a true 'science'. In particular, his rejoinder states how traditional speculative metaphysics could be radically transformed if one approached the undertaking with the 'precision' and exactness indicative of a scientific enterprise. Kant believed that approaching philosophy as a science most importantly entailed that the discipline move along a "secure path" (2003, pg. 17), and do so in terms of a 'linear progression'⁴.

Such an aims of address, or a call to action, was extremely important in the pursuance and advances of various philosophic approaches that would take place over the

¹ (Schonfeld commentary on the reception of the 'A Edition', Sept. 27, 2010)

² (ibid., ibid.)

³ In introducing 'The Principle of Any Transcendental Deduction', that is, before either the 'A-Deduction' or the 'B-Deduction' appears in the *Critique*, Kant provides a rather succinct and compelling critique of early-modern philosophy, in particular, a critique of the British Empiricists. (2003, pg. 127) This all follows Kant's initial distinction between *quid juris* and *quid facti* (ibid., pg. 120), and the role the former plays in any type of deduction at all.

⁴ (Schonfeld commentary on 'Preface B', Oct. 4, 2010)

course of the next two centuries. For instance, such momentum generated by Kant encouraged and led to the pivotal Continental figure Edmund Husserl⁵ to proclaim in 1910 that philosophy should in fact be approached and studied as a “Rigorous Science”⁶. Commentator Paul Tibbetts (1969) acknowledges that around that time in the Anglo-Analytic world of scholarship, Cambridge’s Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell also promoted the study of philosophy as a science in their *Principia Mathematica*. (1969, pg. 207) Tibbetts does admittedly disclose that the latter philosophers’ pursuit was more an appropriation of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s expression a “universal language” (ibid., ibid.) rather than, per se, a logical advancement of Kant’s ‘Preface B’ and its call to radically reform philosophy by means of the ‘precision’ of science. Nonetheless, it should be visible how the 1787 ‘Preface’, in part, changed the grounds for the way philosophy should be studied.

However, does this mean that ‘Preface B’ and its scientific aims of philosophic discourse carries over to the revised ‘B-Deduction’ intentions and unfolding? The answer to this question is “no”, and that actually the case is just the opposite. The ‘A-Deduction’ of the First *Critique* may in fact be interpreted as much more science-friendly than the ‘B-Deduction’, in terms of approaching its initial thesis with the precision, accuracy, and even, rigidity, indicative of a purely scientific endeavor. Make no mistake about it, the ‘B-Deduction’ also contains an intense degree of accuracy and precision in its method. It is extremely important not to understate this fact when comparing it to the

⁵ As far as looking at the study of philosophy from Kant’s general era to Husserl’s particular time, Adorno remarked in a 1959 Frankfurt School lecture on the First *Critique* that, “all philosophers from Kant to Husserl have assumed a kind of parallelism between psychological and transcendental analysis.” (2001, pg. 210)

⁶ Edmund Husserl (1910): “Philosophy as Rigorous Science”, reprinted in Tibbetts, ed., (1969): *Perception: Selected Readings in Science and Phenomenology*, pg. 209-233.

‘A-Deduction’. However, it can be argued that what distinguishes the intensity of precision and accuracy in the ‘A-Deduction’ from that of the ‘B-Deduction’⁷ is almost entirely expressed in terms of the full-fledged ‘objectivity’ scientific discourse and enterprise presupposes. Kant’s expressions such as “all data of intuitions” (2003, pg. 135) exude an aura of cold mechanization and provide a gloss of calculation, as does its discussion of “extension” (think: *Raum*). (ibid., ibid.) Even the discussion and usage of the term “apprehension” in the ‘A-Deduction’, as expressed in terms of the “modifications of the mind” (ibid., pg. 130), all attest to a feeling of calculative and systematic mechanization rather than the creative and ingenious conceptualization one finds in the ‘B-Deduction’.

The ‘B-Deduction’, furthermore, is such a beautiful articulation of all the possibilities and realities that a very structured ‘subjectivity’ and thoroughly defined unity of ‘self-consciousness’ can bring about. Its interplay of the faculties also springs another poignant discussion that will serve as an (interrelated) theme central to the *Critique*, that being the role of ‘the imagination’. Kant gives a really pithy and succinct definition of the imagination here by positing that, “*Imagination* is the faculty of representing in intuition an object that is *not itself present*.” (2003, pg. 165) The ‘A-Deduction’ simply does not contain such condensed and ‘rich’ slogans of eloquence, as far as the articulation of central themes of the *Critique*, such as the role of the imagination (i.e., the imagination in the ‘A-Deduction’ is presented as operating under

⁷ In this paper I employ some of the commentary of Terry Pinkard in *German Philosophy 1760-1860*, but I am not in line with his belief that Kant’s ‘A-Deduction’ and ‘B-Deduction’ are “part of the same enterprise”. (2002, pg. 27) Pinkard goes on to acknowledge that he is just simply following the lead of Kantian scholar Beatrice Longuenesse and her 1998 book *Kant and the Capacity of Judge: Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason* (Princeton University Press), which, in fact, spawned that school of Kantian Scholarship. Therefore, I must acknowledge that my critical exposition does not follow the lead of that particular school of Kantian scholarship, and that I find that the two Deductions have too many distinctions and differences to belong to the same enterprise.

the guises of “orderly”, “sequential” quasi-mechanical “reproduction”) (ibid., pg. 132) and the gravitational pull toward a unified account of ‘self-consciousness’ are concerned. Such eloquence in the ‘B-Deduction’ is reached upon humanistic grounds, whereas the ‘A-Deduction’ has a degree of precision and accuracy in its unfolding that almost border on a sense of ‘rigidity’ usually associated with the unmediated, empirical objectivity presupposed by the most banal of scientific procedures. The ‘B-Deduction’, whose creative interplays culminate in one of the most profound senses of subjectivity available in eighteenth-century German philosophy, could therefore be deemed much more orientated to the worldly pursuits of the humanities. The ‘A-Deduction’, on the other hand, could be said to lend itself more to the exact nature of the sciences.

In terms of the philosophy which would turbulently unfold over the century following Kant’s departure from critical metaphysics and epistemology in 1804, it could be argued that the result was that the ‘B-Deduction’ helped inspire the Neo-Kantianism of the Southwest School (a.k.a. the Baden School), and the ‘A-Deduction’, in part, served as the *raison d’etre* of the movement’s Marburg School⁸. Conversely, this also implies that ‘Preface B’ was the *telos* of the Southwest, while it was ‘Preface A’ that served a similar role in Marburg. The former could be all very confusing unless one looks to the Prefaces and Deductions as cross-fertilizing one another. The result would be that the ‘A-Deduction’ was a moment in time in which Kant looked back upon when rewriting ‘Preface B’. The ‘B-Deduction’ is Kant being reminiscent of the ways things should (and

⁸ Adorno, in the beginning of his 1959 Frankfurt School Lectures on *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, situates this in a somewhat similar fashion, although he adds a little cynicism to it: “The intellectual situation of our age is one in which no work belonging to the past really enjoys such authority any more, and certainly not Kant’s *magnum opus*, for the simple reason that the school that dominated the German universities until around forty years ago has faded somewhat and has become something of a dead dog. This was the Neo-Kantian School in its various guises- mathematical in Marburg and arts-orientated in south-west Germany. (2001, pg. 3)

could) have been interpreted and received by his audience after writing 'Preface A', and originally bestowing the *Critique of Pure Reason* upon the world of philosophy in 1781.

II: The fundamental question put forth by Kant in the beginning of the ‘B-Deduction’, the somewhat unrelated conclusion reached at the end of the passage, and the method employed in between.

Kant’s chief concern at the start of ‘B-Deduction’ centers upon ‘what the relation of representations is to the objects they represent’⁹. (2002, pg. 27) However, the roughly twenty-four pages that follow are an intensive investigation into the deepest and most fundamental realities of subjectivity. This interrogative delve into the very limits and constructs of selfhood results in a conclusion entailing that the conditions allowing for self-consciousness of the Kantian agent are the very ‘conditions for the possibility of objects of experience’. (ibid., ibid.) At one particular point in the second half of the passage, Kant affirms his distinct approach to philosophic ‘reality-testing’ and its probing of the innermost depths of selfhood by positing that, “I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am myself, but only that I am.” (2003, pg. 168) In terms of the central question asked in the beginning the of the passage, Kant finds that the agent must have a deeper understanding of the roles that both intuition and concepts play in judgments and experience if it wants to understand what the relation of representations is to the objects they represent¹⁰. This entails a deeper delve into the innermost dimensions of ‘self-consciousness’.

Back in the ‘A-Deduction’, Kant comes to a view of knowledge as, “[essentially] a whole in which representations stand compared and connected” (2003, pg. 130) However, near the beginning of the ‘B-Deduction’, Kant re-emphasizes, “That representations which can be given prior to all thought should is entitled intuition.”

⁹ Pinkard, in fact, boils down both Deductions intentions’ to this “deceptively simple” statement. (2002, pg. 27)

¹⁰ Pinkard’s synopsis of the Deduction, once again, states this with most eloquence. (2002, pg. 27)

(2003, pg. 153) It is evident to the skilled and detail-minded reader of the First *Critique* that what Kant is doing here is paving the way for the positing of ‘self-consciousness’ as ‘apperception’, and moving along the critical path which will ultimately lead to ‘the synthetic unity of apperception’¹¹. Roger Scruton’s *Survey of Modern Philosophy* traces the usage of the word ‘apperception’ to mean ‘self-consciousness’ back to Leibniz (1994, pg. 226), but acknowledges the very important fact that one of the initial Kantian advancements of the term begins with a distinction made between ‘pure apperception’ and ‘empirical apperception’ in the Deduction and throughout the First *Critique*. There has to be this demarcation made by Kant if there ever is to be such a ‘unity of apperception’ articulated in full-form throughout the Deduction’s unfolding. Indeed, it is of chief importance to Kant to discover and articulate this ‘transcendental unity of self-consciousness’. Kant is so preoccupied with such an endeavor that he very early in the ‘B-Deduction’ reveals to the reader the intimate reality of his delving into the world of subjectivity: that ‘apperception’ is in fact the very “highest principle in the whole sphere of human knowledge.” (2003, pg. 154)

This is quite a bold statement by Kant, especially since he describes “human knowledge” as a “highly complicated web” (ibid, pg. 121) in the section which immediately precedes the sets of Transcendental Deductions. The ‘B-Deduction’ helps one to realize that even though Kant has already philosophized in the First *Critique* that there is no direct intuitive knowledge of anything, that it is because prior to the ‘combination’ of intuition with concepts, there is no such thing as subjectivity or agency

¹¹ Kant presents such a notion’s concrete underpinnings rather early in the ‘B-Deduction’ by writing that, “The synthetic unity of consciousness is, therefore, an objective condition of all knowledge. It is not merely a condition that I myself require in knowing an object, but is a condition under which every intuition must stand in order *to become an object for me*. (2003, pg. 156)

since one cannot have consciousness at all¹². Kant is so adamant about the idea of a ‘combination’ taking place in order for there to be ‘apperception’ and ‘subjectivity’ that he proclaims extremely early in the ‘B-Deduction’ that, “the manifold representations, which are given in an intuition, would not be one and all *my* representations, if they did not belong to self-consciousness. As *my* representations (even if I am not conscious of them as such) they must conform to the condition under which alone they *can* stand together in one universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not all without exception belong to me.” (2003, pg. 153) Concepts are discursive for Kant; they lay down the “*rules*¹³” for the act of combination, which I interpret as a type of underwriting of a creative merger and a governing of such a process that leads to such an astonishingly and radical emergence of ‘selfhood’. Such emergence entails an intense degree of ‘mediation’ to take place in the production of any and all human knowledge whatsoever.

Turning to commentaries on the First *Critique* by two major twentieth-century continental philosophers is in fact rather helpful at this moment, since they further help measure the degree of ‘mediation’ generated by the creative ‘combination’ and complex interplay formerly articulated by Kant. At the Frankfurt School in 1959, Theodor W. Adorno rendered “objectivity as the secret of subjectivity” in the ‘Transcendental Deduction’ (2001, pg. 127). Martin Heidegger, even though he was an extremely important twentieth-century continental philosopher who held entirely intellectual different motives and concerns than Adorno (i.e., think: the ‘Phenomenology’ in Freiburg vs. the ‘Critical Theory’ in Frankfurt), also too placed a prime emphasis on such a

¹² This is all summarized very nicely by Terry Pinkard before he proceeds into his commentary of the core of the Deduction. (2002, pg. 26)

¹³ Pinkard, in *German Philosophy 1760-1860* reiterates this facet of Kantian philosophy. (ibid., ibid.)

process of 'mediation', as far as the 'discursive' role of the concept in its creative 'combination' with intuition to produce knowledge is concerned.

One must remember that without such 'discursivity' on behalf of the concept, the possibility for any type of aggregate knowledge to exist at all for Kant is definitely at risk, and Heidegger focuses on the very process of its 'mediation' which plays such a significant role in the possibility for such knowledge. These aspects of mediation's importance are all pursued within his pithy three page commentary on the 'B-Deduction' (which he refers to as "The Second Way") in 1929's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. (1962, pg. 86-89) This very small portion of the book, which overall is mainly a deconstruction and extension of the section immediately following the 'B-Deduction' ('The Schematism'), centers upon on one particular hermeneutic of the mediated process, that in which Kant discusses in most Heideggerian-friendly terms by acknowledging, "if the synthesis be viewed by itself alone, is nothing but the unity of the act, of which as an act, it is conscious to itself, even without the aid of sensibility, but through which it is yet able to determine sensibility." (2003, pg. 166) Kant's notion of "the act" in this section of the 'B-Deduction' serves a prime interest to Heidegger because of his very own preoccupation with the phenomenological notion of "the event" (*Ereignis*: more specifically and accurately translated as "the event of appropriation", "the event of mutual appropriation", or possibly "the happening", still all somewhat relevant to Kant's notion of "the act" within the bounds of synthesis).

As far as Adorno's more telling and strict commentary on the 'Transcendental Deduction', this pivotal Frankfurt School scholar views the Deduction as Kant's attempt at a, "clarification of the objectivity disguised as subjectivity, secreted in the innermost

kernel, the nuclear core of subjectivity.” (2001, pg. 126) He believes once such a relation has been resolved by Kant, his work in the passage is done and stresses that the fruits of his labor “contain the profoundest thoughts ever to have been written on this subject.” (ibid., ibid.) For Adorno, the *Critique of Pure Reason*’s most broadly-construed central theme concerns how one is to understand the question of “nominalism” and “realism”. This dominant theme once again, of course, brings up the procedural significance and capacity of the ‘mediated’ concept. Adorno summarizes that in the Deduction, “the innermost core of subjectivity, its secret, is revealed as something objective, as the power of objectivity itself...Kant puts forward the idea nothing exists that has not been mediated, that has not been filtered through subjectivity, and that he insists on this with enormous passion.” (ibid., pg. 127) In other words, Adorno finds Kant attempting to philosophize in the ‘Deduction’ how “realism” is the ‘innermost core’ of “nominalism”, and that the revealing of this most intimate of Kantian truths is in itself an explanation and justification of the method employed throughout this passage of the First *Critique*.

Adorno’s summary and interpretation of the ‘Deduction’, and the overall *Critique* in general, are both very helpful in my critical exposition of this particular passage of the book. In terms of the ‘Deduction’ in itself, it proves that even though Kant presents one particular thesis in the beginning of the passage, and reaches a conclusion of arguably a completely different nature at the conclusion, there is nonetheless one single, focused, concrete yet complex method employed by him throughout its unfolding. For Kant and the ‘Deduction’, it is not necessarily about the significance of Point ‘A’ and Point ‘B’, it may actually be ‘the ride’ getting from one to the other that matters the most! There is nonetheless an extreme sense of method to Kant’s madness, and although the world may

at first appear as random fragments and trivial appearances to the ordinary person (this validated by the results of Kant's earlier attempt in the *Critique* to provide an 'inventory' of the mind and the taking of a 'snap-shot'¹⁴ of 'ordinary cognition'), the 'B-Deduction' proves that there is in fact a unified and all-encompassing account of selfhood. This is true despite the initial apparitions of a reality characterized by fragmentation, one such a reality that maybe could be encouraged by Kantian remarks such as "To think an object and to know an object are thus by no means the same thing". (2003, pg. 164)

Despite the brevity of Kant's remarks that could be construed as attesting to a fragmented reality on behalf of the subject, there are in fact copious testimonials throughout the 'B-Deduction' that speak to the natural inclination of the Kantian agent to experience a unified sense of selfhood. The reader finds one of the more memorable testimonials occurring almost directly at the end of the first third of the 'B-Deduction', where Kant attempts to explain the 'priority' of selfhood in the construction and 'experience' of reality by writing that, "To one man, for instance, a certain word suggests one thing, to another some other thing; the unity of consciousness in that which is empirical or not, as regards what is given, necessarily and universally valid." (2003, pg.158) Such testimonials by Kant also bring about another aspect of the Adorno commentary's usefulness, as far as my critical exposition's segue into the next section is concerned. That is, in consistently returning to and highlighting the dominant theme of the *Critique* throughout his analysis of the more telling passages of the 'Deduction', Adorno clarifies for the reader the arguable reality that the roughly twenty-four pages of the 'B-Deduction' are in fact the very heart of the nearly seven-hundred page tome. Adorno's commentary helps one to realize that Kant's concrete yet utterly creative

¹⁴ (Schonfeld commentary on the *Critique*, Oct. 4, 2010)

method employed throughout this short passage is really the epitome of what the book is all about.

III: The Role of the ‘B-Deduction’ in the grander philosophical endeavor(s) of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Many Kant scholars deem the Transcendental Deduction, particularly the ‘B-Deduction’, the most difficult section of one of the most difficult books to historically ever grace the world of philosophy. Even a historian of modern German thought as respected as Terry Pinkard remarks that Kant’s Transcendental Deductions are “one of the most difficult set of chapters in all of his works.” (2003, pg. 26) Although extremely difficult to grasp by many a student of the history of ideas, the Deductions can never be overlooked by someone who wants to gain a profound understanding of the critical Kant’s theoretical philosophy. Accordingly, another eminent historian of modern philosophy, Anthony Kenny, remarks that the ‘Transcendental Deduction’, “stands at the heart of the Kantian philosophy”. (1994, pg. 175)

Kant’s two main philosophical intentions in the writing of the *Critique of Pure Reason* are to provide an exhaustive ‘inventory of cognition’, or in other words, engage in a ‘geographic mapping of the mind’¹⁵ (think: do a philosophical sort of cognitive neuroscience in eighteenth-century East Prussia), and also ‘identify and solve the problem of metaphysics’¹⁶. Just as ‘Aesthetics’ was a socially-constructed term in philosophy (re-coined by Baumgarten), so was ‘Metaphysics’ (derived from a set of Aristotle’s book chapters that immediately came after his book chapters on ‘Physics’, in one of the most renowned libraries [Alexandria] in the history of the Western world). Therefore, if we think back to ‘Metaphysics’ as the study of the principles of “First Philosophy”, that might be a better way to interpret how Kant goes about approaching the

¹⁵ (Schonfeld commentary on ‘Preface B’, Oct. 4, 2010)

¹⁶ (Schonfeld commentary, *ibid.*)

problem of metaphysics and the ‘synthetic *a priori*’. One can think of the ‘B-Deduction’ and its discussion of ‘combination’ as resembling a truly modern study of “First Philosophy”.

In terms of sketching a ‘geography of the mind’ or embarking upon an ‘inventory of cognition’, those ambitions might better lend themselves to the more mechanized and systematic study of the ‘A-Deduction’. Either way, both the ‘A’ and the ‘B’ Deductions occur after Kant has formalized Space and Time (sensory intuitions) in the “Transcendental Aesthetic”, and after he has provided an exhaustive account (think: inventory) of the categories (discursive concepts). What gives the ‘B-Deduction’ a special place in the *Critique* is that it serves as a transition in which there is an intensely creative ‘mash-up’ and ‘free-for-all’ of the aforementioned concepts and intuition under the guise of the ‘combination’. Directly after such ‘free-play’ occurs, Book I of the ‘Transcendental Analytic’ ends, and the sensory intuition of Time takes over again, subjecting the “Analytic of Principles” (Book II) to intense scrutiny.

Conclusion:

In the reading of the ‘B-Deduction’, one is once again allowed to watch philosophy perform and unfold in full ‘flux’, the way Heraclitus would have liked to have seen it (that is, in terms of pure ‘First Philosophy’, and not formalized ‘Metaphysics’). Such an overall *gestalt* lends itself to the final ‘Pragmatic’ Conclusion of the *Critique*, which speaks to Metaphysics (as far as my rendering of it as “First Philosophy” is concerned) as an ‘endpoint’¹⁷. That is, it is something that can be done in full-form only when ‘all culture is perfect’¹⁸. (2003, pg. 665) I find that the ingenuity of the ‘B-Deduction’ embarks us down that long road to perfection.

¹⁷ (Schonfeld commentary on the ‘Architectonic’, Oct. 4, 2010)

¹⁸ “*die Vollendung aller Kultur*” (2003, pg. 665, footnote 1): Metaphysics is “the perfection of all culture”.

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