

# Self-knowledge in §7 of the Transcendental Aesthetic

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## 1 Time as a form of intuition

Kant's claim that time is a subjective form of intuition was first proposed in his Inaugural Dissertation "De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis" of 1770, which he delivered upon being appointed professor of logic and metaphysics at the university of Königsberg. It is in this dissertation that Kant for the first time puts forward his startling claim that time is not objective and real but a pure form of intuition. Section 3 'On the principles of the form of the sensible world' deals with space and time. In §14 he discusses time, claiming that it is "an absolutely first *formal principle of the sensible world*" (AA: 2, p. 402).

*"Time is not something objective and real, nor is it a substance, nor an accident, nor a relation. Time is rather the subjective condition which is necessary, in virtue of the nature of the human mind, for the co-ordinating of all sensible things in accordance with a fixed law. It is a pure intuition"* (AA: 2, p. 400).

## 2 The criticisms of Lambert, Mendelssohn and Schultz

This view was immediately criticised in reviews and letters by Lambert, Mendelssohn and Schultz. Soon after the publication of the Inaugural Dissertation, Johann Heinrich Lambert wrote a letter dated 13. October 1770 to Kant in which he puts forward an objection to treating time as a form of intuition. Later on he restates the criticism in a review in the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* (Vol. 20, No. 1, 1773) of Herz's defence of Kant's Inaugural Dissertation entitled *Betrachtungen aus der spekulativen Weltweisheit*.

"Alle Veränderungen sind an die Zeit gebunden und lassen sich ohne Zeit nicht gedenken. Sind die Veränderungen real so ist die Zeit real, was sie auch immer seyn mag. Ist die Zeit nicht real so ist auch keine

Veränderung real. Es dünkt mich aber doch, daß auch selbst ein Idealiste wenigstens in seinen Vorstellungen Veränderungen, wie anfangen und aufhören derselben zugeben muß, das wirklich vorgeht und existirt. Und damit kann die Zeit nicht als etwas nicht reales angesehen werden” (AA: 10, p. 102).<sup>1,a</sup>

In a letter from 25. December 1770, Moses Mendelssohn makes a similar criticism:

“Daß die Zeit etwas bloß Subjektives seyn sollte, kan ich mich aus mehrern Gründen nicht bereden. Die Succession ist doch wenigstens eine nothwendige Bedingung der Vorstellungen endlicher Geister. Nun sind die endlichen Geister nicht nur Subjekte, sondern auch Objekte der Vorstellungen, so wohl Gottes, als ihrer Mitgeister. Mithin ist die Folge auf einander, auch als etwas objektives anzusehen”<sup>b</sup> (AA: 10, p. 110).

The problem is thus that the reality of time seems to follow from the reality of change. The reality of change, in turn, appears to be undeniable since even an idealist has to accept that representations change. While it might be granted that space can be considered as the form of outer sense, it seems that time cannot be understood merely as the form of inner sense.

Accordingly, it does not seem to be possible for change to be a mere appearance. As Lambert notes in §54 of the *Phänomenologie* in his 1764 *Neues Organon*: “Wenn in dem Schein eine Aenderung vorgeht, so geht auch in der That eine Aenderung vor. Es bleibt aber noch unausgemacht, ob sie in dem Objecte, oder in dem Sinn oder in der Verhältniß von beyden, oder in zwey oder in allen drey Stücken vorgehe. Hingegen aber giebt die Aenderung im Schein das Relative von der wirklichen Aenderung an”<sup>c</sup> (Lambert: 1764, Band 2, p. 248). That is, if there is a semblance of change, then there really is a change. There is only a question of what it is that is changing, namely whether it is the subject, the object or the relation between the subject and the object, but there is no question that something is changing.

We can clarify this issue by considering a closely related problem for treating time as a feature of the way we represent the world that arises if we focus on the temporal status of representations.<sup>2</sup> The problem is that if we try to treat temporality merely as a feature of how we represent the world, then we seem to end up in an

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<sup>1</sup>Rough translations are provided in the endnotes.

<sup>2</sup>This problem is modelled on H. A. Pistorius’s critique of transcendental idealism developed in reviews of Kant’s *Prolegomena* (reviewed in Vol. 59, No. 2 *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, 1784) and Schultz’s *Erläuterungen über des Herrn Professor Kant Critik der reinen Vernunft* (reviewed in Vol. 66, No. 1 *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, 1786). There he notes that he could not “sich davon zu überzeugen, daß die in der Zeit gegebene Empfindungen nur eben so blos Phänomen wären, als die im Raum gegebene Anschauungen, weil er sich nämlich über die Schwierigkeit nicht helfen konnte, daß weil alsdenn unsre innern Empfindungen oder Vorstellungen nicht Dinge an sich selbst, sondern Erscheinungen sein müßten, nichts als Schein da wäre, und kein reelles Object

infinite regress. This is because representations themselves seem to have temporal properties and to stand in temporal relations. In order for representations to be in time there would have to be further representations that would represent them as being in time. That is, if we want to say that representations are not really in time but are only represented to be in time, then we need further representations doing the representing, leading us to an infinite regress. To avoid this regress it seems that we would have to say that representations are not merely represented to be in time but are really in time. In this case, however, we would be committed to viewing time as more than a form of intuition. Thus, if representations are in time, then it would seem to follow that time cannot merely be a feature of how we represent the world.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that this problem is peculiar to time and cannot be extended to space. The reality of space can be denied by treating spatiality as a mere appearance that derives from the way we represent the world. Spatiality then pertains only to the way we represent the world and not to how the world is in itself. While we can unproblematically treat spatiality as a feature of how we represent the world since spatiality can be reduced to non-spatial representations, problems arise in the case of time since representations themselves seem to be temporal which disqualifies them from being a reductive base for temporality. The reality of temporality seems undeniable since we cannot treat it as a mere appearance that can be reduced to representations. This is because representations themselves seem to be temporal objects that exist and change in time. Given that representations are in time, temporality unlike spatiality cannot merely pertain to the content of representations.

Stated abstractly, the problem is that if a feature is derivative, then that from which this feature (ultimately) derives cannot also be characterised by that feature (i.e. it cannot equally be derivative). Since, according to transcendental idealism, temporality is in some sense a derivative feature that is due to how we represent the world, it follows that that from which temporality derives, namely the way we represent the world, cannot itself be temporal. Yet, our representations, intuitively, seem to be temporal, thereby appearing to preclude the possibility that temporality only pertains to how the world is represented by us and not how it is in itself.

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übrig bliebe, dem etwas erscheine”<sup>d</sup> (Pistorius: 1784, p. 345). It is not clear “wie es nämlich sich als möglich gedenken lasse, daß Vorstellungen, die man doch immer als reell, oder als Dinge an sich selbst voraussetzen muß, wenn man überhaupt erklären will, wie ein Scheinen möglich sey, selbst nur ein Schein seyn können, und das was dasjenige dann ist, wodurch und worinn dieser Schein existiret?”<sup>e</sup> (Pistorius: 1784, pp. 345-346).

<sup>3</sup>This problem is also noted by McTaggart at the end of his article on the unreality of time. “And how are we to deal with the appearance itself? If we reduce time and change to appearance, must it not be to an appearance which changes and which is in time, and is not time, then, shown to be real after all?” (McTaggart: 1908, p. 474)

### 3 Kant's reply

Kant took these criticisms very seriously. In the well-known letter to Herz dated 21. February 1772 Kant notes that the objection put forward by Lambert “der wesentlichste ist, den man dem Lehrbegriff machen kan”<sup>f</sup> (AA: 10, p. 134). In this letter he also outlines his response to the objection, which he later on develops in the ‘Elucidation’ of the *Transcendental Aesthetic* (labelled §7 in the B-Edition). There he characterises the criticism as follows: “Veränderungen sind wirklich (dies beweiset der Wechsel unserer eigenen Vorstellungen, wenn man gleich alle äußere Erscheinungen sammt deren Veränderungen leugnen wollte). Nun sind Veränderungen nur in der Zeit möglich, folglich ist die Zeit etwas Wirkliches”<sup>g</sup> (A37/B53).

He then responds to the objection by saying: “Die Beantwortung hat keine Schwierigkeit. Ich gebe das ganze Argument zu.<sup>4</sup> Die Zeit ist allerdings etwas Wirkliches, nämlich die wirkliche Form der innern Anschauung. Sie hat also subjective Realität in Ansehung der innern Erfahrung, d. i. ich habe wirklich die Vorstellung von der Zeit und meinen Bestimmungen in ihr. Sie ist also wirklich, nicht als Object, sondern als die Vorstellungsart meiner selbst als Objects anzusehen. ... [footnote: Ich kann zwar sagen: meine Vorstellungen folgen einander; aber das heißt nur, wir sind uns ihrer als in einer Zeitfolge, d. i. nach der Form des innern Sinnes, bewußt. Die Zeit ist darum nicht etwas an sich selbst, auch keine den Dingen objectiv anhängende Bestimmung]”<sup>h</sup> (A37/B53-54).

Kant not only gives a response to the objection, but also provides a diagnosis of why this criticism came so naturally to many of the people who read the *Inaugural Dissertation*. The source of the objection is traced to a Cartesian understanding of self-knowledge, according to which we have immediate access to our mental states. This Cartesianism is most explicit in Schultz’s review of the *Inaugural Dissertation* when he says: “Denn vermöge der innerlichen Empfindung beschauet die Seele sich selbst und alles, was gegenwärtig in ihr vorgehet, nämlich, sie empfindet unmittelbar die Gegenwart aller Veränderungen, die in ihr wirklich geschehen, sie mögen herrühren, woher sie wollen, und entweder Eindrücke von äußern Dingen, oder reine Vorstellungen des Verstandes, oder volitiones seyn, und ist sich dahero derselben bewußt”<sup>i</sup> (Schultz: 1771, Vol. 95, Monday 25. November, p. 373).

Kant’s critics privileged the inner (i.e. the temporal) over the outer (i.e. the spatial), claiming that while knowledge of the self is direct, knowledge of outer objects is inferential. By restricting the objects of which we are immediately aware to mental items, one excludes immediate awareness of spatial items, but does not exclude immediate awareness of temporal items. While representations are intuitively taken to be entities that exist in time and change in time, they are usually

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<sup>4</sup>Regarding Kant’s use of the phrase ‘I admit the entire argument’, it is worth pointing out that “the phrase ‘I concede the entire argument’ (concede totum argumentum) was a standard response employed by participants in scholastic disputations. The phrase was used to charge that the opponent had reached an irrelevant conclusion” (Falkenstein: 1995, p. 435 endnote 9).

not considered as spatial entities, making it the case that we are not immediately aware of any spatial items, which, in turn, implies that knowledge of spatial entities is not immediate but inferential. It is for this reason that they were willing to accept that space could be a form of intuition, while denying that this status could be attributed to time. Given this conception of knowledge, it is not possible to infer from a subject's being aware of things standing in spatial relations to there being anything that is really spatial. This is because spatiality might pertain merely to the content of representations. Yet it is possible to infer from a subject's being aware of things standing in temporal relations to there being something that is really temporal. The succession of representations of which we are aware cannot pertain to the content of representations but must instead pertain to the representations themselves. That is, given the Cartesian understanding of self-knowledge we can be directly aware of representations and their temporal relations.

Kant's response involves a radical rejection of the traditional understanding of self-knowledge. He rejects the view that the inner is epistemically privileged over the outer. Rather than granting epistemic priority to the inner, our knowledge of both inner and outer objects is restricted to knowledge of appearances. One has to realise that objects of inner and outer sense "beide, ohne daß man ihre Wirklichkeit als Vorstellungen bestreiten darf, gleichwohl nur zur Erscheinung gehören"<sup>j</sup> (A38/B55). Kant's account of inner sense is thus completely analogous to his account of outer sense. In each case, representations are mediated by the form of intuition and only represent objects as they appear to us. Whether we are dealing with an inner object or an outer object, in each case an affection relation provides a manifold of intuition (inner manifold v. outer manifold) and each time the manifold is processed and mediated by the form of intuition (form of inner sense: time v. form of outer sense: space). Kant can then claim that we only know ourselves as we appear and that we lack knowledge of the self as a thing in itself. It is the adoption of this anti-Cartesian position that allows him to retain his commitment to understanding time as a form of intuition. Kant's response is thus a strong form of anti-Cartesianism that involves a rejection of claims to knowledge of the self as it is in itself. Inner phenomena, like outer phenomena are only known to us as appearances.<sup>5</sup>

To retain the idea that time is a subjective form of intuition, Kant has to argue that the representations that are in time and that change are appearances. This conflicts with an understanding of self-knowledge whereby we have knowledge of the self as it is in itself, whereby we have direct access to our mental states. This Cartesian conception is rejected by Kant. Rather than having access to our mental states as they are in themselves, our knowledge of ourselves is mediated by the form of inner sense. The mediation resulting from the form of inner sense

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<sup>5</sup>This anti-Cartesianism also plays an important role in Kant's discussions of idealism, in particular in the Fourth Paralogism of the A-Edition and in the Refutation of Idealism in the B-Edition.

undercuts direct access to our mental states as they are in themselves. As a result, we do not have access to the representations as they are in themselves, but only have access to representations as they appear. This implies that we are only aware of appearances and not of the mental states themselves. We only have access to the intentional contents of the mental states, i.e. to what is represented, and these contents are always mediated by the form of inner sense. Accordingly, we can only have knowledge of ourselves as we appear to ourselves.

To make sense of this view we need to distinguish between noumenal representations or mental states and the intentional objects that they represent. This view allows us to claim that we do not have direct access to our mental states as they are in themselves but are only aware of the intentional contents of these states, whereby our awareness of these contents has been mediated by the form of inner sense. In this way we can identify the temporal intentional objects as the appearances of which we are aware by means of inner sense, while making room for the underlying mental states that exist in themselves and to which these appearances can be reduced.

As a result, we can claim that the mental states themselves are not temporal and do not undergo change. They are “weder veränderlich noch unveränderlich . . . ; die Dinge der Welt sind objektiv oder an sich selbst weder in einerley Zustande in verschiedenen Zeiten, noch in verschiedenem Zustande denn sie werden in diesem Verstande gar nicht in der Zeit vorgestellt”<sup>k</sup> (AA: 10, p. 134). While representations in themselves are not temporal and do not undergo change, appearances of representations are represented to be temporal and to undergo change. It is only the intentional contents of the noumenal mental states that are temporal and that are represented to be changing. This means that it is no longer possible to infer from the temporality of the representations of which we are aware to the temporality of the representations themselves. It does not follow from the fact that representations are represented to be changing that the representations themselves undergo changes.

Once we accept that the objects of inner sense, like those of outer sense, are appearances and that we only know ourselves as we appear, we can see that inner sense only provides us with the appearance of change. The inference from an appearance of change to a change of appearances is thereby invalidated. Pace Lambert it can then turn out that all alteration is mere appearance and only pertains to how things appear and not to how things are in themselves. All we have is appearances of change. There is no change of appearances, no succession of appearances. “Ich kann nicht einmal sagen: die innere Erscheinung verändere sich”<sup>l</sup> (AA: 10, p. 134). “Kant here appears to be taking a radical line indeed – that no items whatever stand in temporal relations, not even our own mental episodes. . . . [T]here is consciousness of succession, but no succession of conscious states. . . . [Any temporal relation] must occur exclusively as an experiential content – only *within* experiences and not *between* them” (van Cleve: 1999, pp. 54-55).

Kant wants to say that in the same way that bodies are represented to be spa-

tially ordered without being spatial in themselves, representations are represented to be temporally ordered without being temporal in themselves. These two cases seem to be disanalogous since in the case of time there seems to be a need for further representations doing the representing, leading to a regress. This problem can, however, be solved by distinguishing the noumenal mental state from the intentional object, allowing non-temporal mental states to have temporally ordered intentional objects. Kant can then claim that the represented objects are represented to occupy temporal locations, without the representations themselves having temporal locations. It needs to be denied that representations in themselves are temporal entities that exist and change in time. This means that only appearances of representations are in time, not the representations themselves.

Accordingly, we can reduce the temporality of the contents of awareness to non-temporal features of the noumenal mental states. There is something that is real, namely the mental states. They are responsible for the appearance of change, but they themselves do not change. Their intentional objects are in time since they are represented to be in time, but they themselves are not in time. This then allows us to say that “Veränderungen etwas wirkliches seyn . . . [insoweit] etwas wirkliches der Erscheinung correspondiere”<sup>m</sup> (AA: 10, p. 134).

## 4 Conclusion

The objections raised by Lambert, Mendelssohn and Schultz assume that we have direct access to our representations and can know that they are temporal, that they are in time and change in time. Accordingly, it would seem that we cannot treat time as an appearance, as merely a feature of the way we represent the world. Since representations themselves are taken to be temporal entities, it would follow that temporality cannot be reduced to a feature of the way things are represented to be. Instead, it would have to be a feature of how things really are.

By distinguishing noumenal representations from their intentional objects Kant can avoid this problem. Representations understood as intentional objects are indeed temporal. However, they are only appearances and are only temporal because they are represented to be temporal. Temporality thus pertains only to the content of our awareness and not to the representations themselves. The representations themselves are not temporal and are neither changing nor unchanging. They pertain to the self considered as a thing in itself.

This means that the Cartesian conception of self-knowledge is mistaken. We lack epistemic access to the representations themselves and only have access to their intentional contents. We are aware not of the representations but of their intentional objects, of what they represent. Temporality can then be restricted in such a way that it only pertains to the intentional objects of representations, allowing us to claim that representations themselves are not in time and do not undergo change. Only the intentional contents of these mental states are in time

since they have been subjected to the form of inner sense and are represented to be in time.

In other words, appearances are represented to be temporal and are represented to be changing in time. Representations themselves, however, are not in time and do not change. Accordingly, Kant can consistently hold that time is merely a feature of the way we represent the world, without representations themselves being in time since it is only the intentional objects of which we are aware that are in time.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>For helpful comments, I would like to thank Andrew Roche and Anna Tomaszewska, as well as audiences at St Andrews and at the Kant Kongress in Pisa.

## Notes

<sup>a</sup>All alterations are bound to time and cannot be thought without time. If the alterations are real, then time is real, whatever it may be. If time is not real, then no alteration is real either. I think however that even an idealist must admit alterations that really happen and exist, like beginning and ceasing to be, in his representations. And therewith time cannot be seen as something that is not real.

<sup>b</sup>That time is supposed to be something merely subjective, is something of which I cannot convince myself for several reasons. Succession is at least a necessary condition of representations of finite spirits. Now, finite spirits are not only subjects, but also objects of representations of God, as well as other spirits. Therewith succession upon one another should also be seen as something objective.

<sup>c</sup>If an alteration takes place in appearance, then an alteration also takes place in fact. It still remains undetermined though whether it takes place in the object, or in the sense, or in the relation of the two, or in two or in all three parts. By contrast the alteration in appearance indicates the relative of the real alteration.

<sup>d</sup>convince himself that the sensations that are given in time are equally mere phenomena as the intuitions given in space, because he could not overcome the difficulty that as soon as our inner sensations or representations would have to be not things in themselves but appearances, nothing other than appearance would be there and no real object would remain to which something would appear.

<sup>e</sup>how it is possible to think that representations, which we always have to presuppose as real or as things in themselves if one wants to explain how an appearing is possible, can themselves be mere appearance and what that then is whereby and wherein this appearance exists?

<sup>f</sup>is the most fundamental that can be raised against the doctrine.

<sup>g</sup>Alterations are real (this is proved by the change of our own representations, even if one would deny all outer appearances together with their alterations). Now alterations are possible only in time, therefore time is something real.

<sup>h</sup>There is no difficulty in answering. I admit the entire argument. Time is certainly something real, namely the real form of inner intuition. It therefore has subjective reality in regard to inner experience, i.e., I really have the representation of time and of my determinations in it. It is therefore to be regarded really not as object but as the way of representing myself as object. ... [footnote: I can, to be sure, say: my representations succeed one another; but that only means that we are conscious of them as in a temporal sequence, i.e., according to the form of inner sense. Time is not on that account something in itself, nor any determination objectively adhering to things.]

<sup>i</sup>Because by means of inner sense the soul observes itself and everything that is presently happening in it, namely it senses immediately the presence of all alterations that are really taking place in it and is therewith conscious of them, wherever they may come from, whether they be impressions of outer things or pure representations of the understanding or volitions.

<sup>j</sup>both, without their reality as representations being disputed, nevertheless belong only to appearance.

<sup>k</sup>neither mutable nor immutable ...; the things of the world are objectively or in themselves neither in a single condition at different times, nor in different conditions since in this respect they are not at all represented in time.

<sup>l</sup>I cannot even say: the inner appearance is changing.

<sup>m</sup>alterations are something real ... [insofar as] something real corresponds to the appearance.

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