

**THE CONSTITUTIVE AND
REGULATIVE PRINCIPLES
IN KANT; A DISSERTATION**

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The constitutive and regulative principles in Kant; a dissertation by Elijah Jordan

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ELIJAH JORDAN

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THE CONSTITUTIVE AND REGULATIVE
PRINCIPLES IN KANT

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS
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BY
ELIJAH JORDAN



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose¹ of this essay is to inquire into Kant's reasons for the classification of principles as constitutive and regulative, and to find, if possible, how far and in what sense the distinction holds. The method employed will appeal to the use of the principles in experience. The inquiry will not extend beyond the limits of the application of the principles of the understanding, it being assumed that any other use of the principles as constitutive or regulative has its basis within those limits.

Kant is asking in what the certainty of knowledge consists. He assumes that knowledge, when conceived of as the whole of our recorded and present subjective experience, has somewhere a stable point with reference to which changes have significance, and from which progress takes its direction. This point is called the object, and the certainty of knowledge is established when its relation to the object is determined. All difficulties which arise in connection with the description of the knowledge process are just questions of the nature of this relation; and they may all be summed up as the problem of the definition of the object. What constitutes the difficulty in the case of any definition of the object, is the tendency, on the one hand, to put the definition in terms of our particular subjective experiences, and on the other, to have left as unaccountable a realistic remainder after the subjective definition has been made.

The first of these tendencies suggests the "construction" of the object; the second the discovery of the object indirectly and in a "regulative" way. Kant's justification of construction claims a basis in the fact of the *a priori* certainty of mathematical knowledge; and his justification of regulation in the fact of the practical certainty of empirical knowledge. At the outset he claims that "one part of this knowledge, namely, the mathematical, has always been in possession of perfect trustworthiness; and thus produces a favorable presumption with regard to other parts also, although these may be of a totally different nature."² It is probable that the other parts here referred to are the knowledge of morality, but the real difficulty is whether the presumption

¹ Results are summarized on the last page of the essay.

² A., p. 4; B., p. 8.

holds favorable with respect to perceptual experience. The purpose of this essay may be stated again as an inquiry as to how far this favorable presumption may be said to hold good.

To examine the process of construction calls for an examination of the concept of quantity, and the results obtained here will lead us to notice the nature and extent of the application of the regulative principles. When the latter have been established in their logical connections, it will be necessary to show their identity with the constitutive principles, not, however, through the complicated machinery employed by Kant, but through the simple characters of objects in experience.

Construction is in pure intuition. Many questions arise, however, in connection with pure intuition, as e.g., What is pure intuition? What does construction in pure intuition mean? Kant's answer to the first of these questions is that pure intuition is space and time, and as such, is valid as an object, and is definable as a rule of synthesis in the time relations of representations. This answer does not simplify matters, for it answers the epistemological question perhaps too hastily, in any case, abstractly. The intuitions are now referred to the real in sensation, and the question is whether the latter may be constructed quantitatively. Looked at more closely, quantity is seen to have connections with all the other categories through time.

For Kant there is a pure consciousness of quantity, or a consciousness in which no other character is involved; but of quantity in this sense there are no axioms, and hence no general certainty. Where there are axioms, *quantitas* becomes *quanta* and is schematized as number. It is the fact that *quantitas* becomes *quanta* which brings it into relation with the other categories; and if the principles involved here are constitutive, they are also regulative.

At this point Kant abandons quantity for its schema number, which again raises the question of the relation of sense and thought. Its definition involves time and the consciousness of succession as a synthesis. But succession in time with regard to objects involves phenomena in relations of space; this again involves substance and the permanent, with reference to which time is constitutive, and an act, which would decide the question in favor of construction. Time, however, constructs only possibilities, to which there are: (1) realistic objections with the argument of evolution; and (2) skeptical objections. To (1) Kant would say that evolution is merely a "predicable" of time-quantity, and does not apply. To (2) there is appeal to the transcendental concept of the possibility of experience.

Kant at this point seems to realize that as time and number, quantity ends in abstraction and does not touch objects. If quantity is to be a valid concept a content must be discovered for it, so a distinction must be made. Quantity is extensive quantity; and if the possibility of experience and hence the transcendental argument is to hold good, it must be remembered that the possibility of experience is just what makes the synthesis of the homogeneous a quantity. This synthesis as abstract quantity is empty conception and the bare possibility. To find a content for the synthesis we must appeal to the homogeneous in space. Generalized time formulas involve space; but the generalized synthesis is the object as the permanent substance, hence space and time are both necessary to quantity, that is, space is the schema of time just as time succession as number is the schema of quantity. Time as a schema applies to objects in only a computative sense, and provides for succession only. But the real phenomena demand their coexistence, so quantity must be schematized as space also. Quantity schematized as both time and space involves the permanent.

But if space as well as time is involved in construction we are carried beyond the idea of quantity as merely extensive. To construct the object of experience, quantity must be definitely limited, and as such becomes intensive quantity. For knowledge, differences of extensity are immaterial, and to make a knowledge difference extensity must be qualified. As qualified by a line of approach to the real, quantity is characterized by differences of degree. Quality has a statement in terms of *a priori* possibilities, for it must be *a priori* if there is to be formal construction. In what sense is quality *a priori*? The *a priori* in the sensuous intuition with respect to quality is the mathematical principle that it must have a degree. As such it is described as (1) a conceptual mean in a series; (2) a moment of consciousness; and (3) a subjective fact. Neither of these descriptions is consistently worked out by Kant.

A reconstruction may begin here upon the basis of results thus far reached. The principle of the possibility of experience, if the reference is to the concrete actuality of experience, is applicable only to those principles which operate only in a regulative way. The distinctions drawn so rigidly between sense and understanding and space and time must be ignored; and whatever principles were found applicable to experience after those distinctions are made, must be regarded merely as special applications of the principles which operate within experience taken as a whole and with all its connections intact. In this way the constitutive principles are analytic only, and serve to exemplify the

method of the regulative principles. They do not construct the object, but merely represent to consciousness the object as the purpose of the complex of the representations in consciousness. While we allow an independent function to the constitutive principles, our notion of the object is the crudely realistic one, and we have upon our hands the ambiguous question of representation. This question disappears as meaningless when the constitutive principles are shown to apply only to the imaged stage of a purpose, which is completed as an object when upon the method of the regulative principles it is connected at all points with experience.

The nature of the regulative principles is then to be understood from a proper estimation of these experience connections, and these connections can be correctly estimated only when approached from the point of view of their unity of purpose. It thus simplifies our method when we regard all experience connections as instants of causation, while all other regulative principles will come out in the account as corollaries of this one principle. It is just from this general point of view that the first result prohibits application of causality to the sequence in time only, for that sequence never reaches the consequent which we call the object. Causation regarded as merely temporal shows by its failure that some other idea is needed to complete it. This qualifying character is found to be the very connectedness of experience itself. Causation in experience is thus seen to involve more than time, in fact every general characterization of experience is involved in any concrete instance of it.

How are objects known, is the fundamental question for Kant, and his famous formulation of it as, How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible, arises from a recognition of the fact that all judgments that are significant get their significance from a point of reference beyond the individual intent from which they start—in other words from reference to an object. That significant judgments are “objective” is true, however it may be necessary to define the object. The relation of thought to its object is the locus of all questions of validity, and therefore the proper object of all philosophical investigation. That same famous question was less formally and more intelligibly stated before the form of the *Kritik* was worked out, as is shown by the letter to Herz,¹ in which its form is, “Wie können sich Begriffe *a priori* auf Objecte beziehen?” Questions of the nature and limits of thought are unintelligible apart from considerations of the nature of the objects.

There have been various explanations of the relations which thought

¹ See Riehl, *Der philosophische Kriticismus*, Vol. I, p. 329.

bears to its object—that the object participates in the nature of the idea, that the object is represented in the idea, that the object is unreal and a miscarriage of the idea, that the relation between the two is unique and must be taken without explanation, that the object is the construction of the idea—the latter having various interpretations. For instance, the object is constructed out of a perfectly undifferentiated original matter through the process of time; or the object is made by the idea out of the original elements of the latter. All of these Kant reduces to two general doctrines,¹ namely, representation and construction, and he accepts the latter. It requires, however, the whole of the *Kritik* to explain in just what sense he holds to construction. Briefly, the object is constructed by the idea out of original forms; but the freedom of indifference is not given the active thought principle, since the latter has itself a definite constitution within which only it can operate. Thought is limited by itself; has its own bounds set for it in its own nature. Within these bounds it is free to construct its object, to say what it will mean, to determine its own direction.

Thus there are objects of the understanding and "ideals" of the reason; and if the latter are as objects problematical, it is because objects are needed when the forms of space and time do not lie in the direction in which the need becomes intention. The former are determined after the analogy of mathematics by or according to principles that are constitutive; the latter on the analogy of experience by or according to principles that are regulative.² It will be shown below, however, that the distinction between constitutive and regulative is not so much one of principles as one of objects; and that all principles, in that they relate to objects, are both constitutive and regulative.

A distinction might here be made between principles of thought and principles of knowledge. The former get their distinctive character as the active agencies at work in the process of thought, or, if the different faculties of mind are not differentiated so sharply, represent only the different directions or means by which thought seeks its object. The latter have value, after the object is obtained and defined, in comparing and organizing the objects of thought in the system of experience as a whole. The former are subjective, principles of mind, and are active and constitutive in determining objects.³ The latter are objective,

¹ A., p. 92. See also the letter to Herz, February 21, 1772, Kant's *Werke*, Kirchmann's ed., Vol. VIII, pp. 402-9.

² A., p. 179; B., p. 221.

³ A., pp. 126, 300, 718-19; B., pp. 356, 746-47.