



January 2010

Categories and Schemata

Anthony Schlimgen
info@ubiquitypress.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/ijurca>

Recommended Citation

Schlimgen, Anthony (2010) "Categories and Schemata," *International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 9.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/ijurca/vol2/iss2/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@CWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in *International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities* by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@CWU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@cwu.edu.

Categories and Schemata

Anthony Schlimgen
Creighton University

Published online: 26 July 2010
© Anthony Schlimgen 2010

In this paper, I argue that once Kant has established his argument about the *a priori* transcendental ideality of Time, the objectivity of the Categories and their schematization can be established. If we remember that the Categories are not only concepts, but *transcendental* concepts, we will see that their objective nature is not as difficult to establish as if we were to consider them only as concepts as such. Further, once we understand the function of the Schematism and how Kant conceives of the Schemata, this will shed light as to the nature of the Categories themselves. Finally, I will propose an understanding of the relationship between the Categories and Schemata that will make a transcendental solution to the problem of the objectivity of the Categories and Schemata possible.

We begin with a description of the Categories in general, and what role they play in Kant's system. With regards to the objectivity of the Categories, we must understand that Kant wishes to show their objective validity, and not their objective reality. But what would it mean for the Categories to be objectively *valid* instead of *real*? Kant provides us with an answer: "...[A] difficulty is revealed here that we did not encounter in the field of sensibility, namely how the subjective conditions of thinking should have objective validity i.e., yield conditions of the possibility of all cognition of objects" (A 89-90/B 122).¹ This means that we must somehow prove that the Categories constitute the conditions of the possibility of knowledge of objects in general. So for the Categories to be objectively valid is to say that there is some feature of the Categories that objectively grounds our judgments about experience.

This characterization as objectively valid as opposed to real should give us an indication as to how we should further consider the Categories; it seems that we are dealing with logic and not ontology when it comes to the Categories. I mean "logic" here in a broad sense, but to characterize the categories as valid hints at the logical role they will play in cognition. We will see that this role is closely related to the Kant's

notion of judgments and how judgments contribute to the process of cognition. In general, there is an important connection between the table of Judgments and the table of Categories. Kant says:

The same function that gives unity to the different representations in a judgment also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations in an intuition, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of the understanding. The same understanding, therefore, and indeed by means of the very same actions through which it brings the logical form of a judgment into concepts by means of the analytic unity, also brings a transcendental content into its representation by means of the synthetic unity of the manifold in intuition in general, on account of which they are called pure concepts of the understanding that pertain to objects *a priori*... (A 79/B 104-5)

This passage articulates the complex and important relationship between judgments and Categories, and we will examine this relationship in detail.

When Kant says that “[t]he same function that gives unity to the different representations in a judgment also give unity to the mere synthesis of different representations in an intuition,” he is referring to the functions of judgment. Each function of judgment characterizes judgments in a certain way, and, analogously, there are functions of intuitions that characterize intuitions in a certain way. These functions of intuitions Kant calls Categories, or pure concepts of the understanding. Kant asserts that the Categories have the same functions that their corresponding functions of judgment have, and in this way he derives the Table of Categories. It is arguable how exactly each Category corresponds to each judgment, but that debate can be set aside. What is important is that Kant argues that there is a functional similarity between how we make judgments and how we organize intuitions.

But now we must understand what the functions of the Categories are. If not specifically each Category, in general how are we to understand concepts that functionally unify the manifold of intuitions? This question can only be answered once we know what Kant thinks functions are. He says, “By a function...I understand the unity of the action of ordering different representations under a common one” (A 68/B 93). So with regards to intuitions, the representations that the understanding is ordering are simply the representations found in intuitions. Now are these representations ordered before they come under the function of the Categories? It seems that they would have to be ordered by Space and Time as forms of intuitions precisely because all of our intuited representations must be formally ordered by Space and Time as transcendental conditions for intuitions.

But what is the relationship between the Categories and concepts as such? Indeed, Kant entitles the Categories the “Pure Concepts of the Understanding,” but how are we to understand the Categories as concepts? The difference between the Categories and concepts that I would like to highlight (there are many differences) is how the Categories relate to objects. Let us go back to what Kant needs the Categories for in the first place. Kant needs the Categories to ground our cognitions objectively so that they relate to our thoughts and to our experiences *a priori*. If he can show the relationship between thoughts and experiences to be *a priori* Kant will have found the grounds of metaphysics as a science. So Kant must argue that the Categories relate to experience in an *a priori* fashion. We can immediately see how this relationship is different than the relationship between certain concepts and their objects; concepts do not relate to objects *a priori*.

But there is another, and in my view more important difference between the Categories and concepts as such. This difference concerns what each actually relate to. Concepts as such are related to objects as such. My concept of “dog” is related to several dogs that are possible objects of my intuition. But what are the Categories related to? What they are related to could also be called objects, but these objects are quite different than the objects that concepts are related to. The Categories are related to objects of our intuitions that are almost wholly undetermined. They are determined insofar as they are subject to the pure forms of intuition i.e. Space and Time, but other than that they are wholly undetermined by our understanding.

What exactly does it mean, then, for the Categories to be related to objects *a priori*, and how does Kant know that they are? The only way Kant can show such a conclusion is through a transcendental argument, and that is what he attempts. He first assumes that the manifold of intuition is originally wholly undetermined (let us take this assumption as a given, despite its problems). But Kant noticed that our intuitions are determined, and not only by Space and Time, but by concepts. I see *that* tree, and how *that* tree is different from *this* tree, and how *this* tree is five feet tall, and how *that* wall is ten feet tall. Obviously our intuitions as we experience them are determined, so we must have determined them. This is basically what Kant’s transcendental argument is, but there are, of course, details that I have left out. In general, though, we can see Kant’s motivation and understand his move to consider certain things about experience to be *a priori* related to the understanding. Not only are objects of my intuition determined, but they are also persisting in the sense that objects do not spontaneously shape-shift and change forms; in short, our experience is rather regular and constant. From this observation Kant determined that the only way this could occur out of a completely undetermined manifold is not only if we organized our experiences, but if these experiences are also organized in an *a priori* constant fashion.²

So the representations of the manifold (organized by Space and Time) must then be determined in an *a priori* fashion by certain functions of the understanding in order for

us to have the experiences that we do in fact have. How these functions each specifically order our intuitions and how these functions relate to each moment in the Table of Judgments is, again, not a debate I will enter here. For our purposes, it is enough to show why Kant thinks our intuitions are ordered by Categories in an *a priori* fashion. I do not find his argument to be at all unreasonable, given his assumptions. We can see that the understanding orders our intuitions in such a way that they are organized into experiences for us in a necessary *a priori* fashion.

Here, though, we see a convenient relationship that Kant can exploit to make his assertion about this *a priori* synthesis a little more plausible. Since a feature of anything *a priori* is that it has a necessary and universal character, the Categories must be related to things that are nearly completely undetermined in order for them (the Categories) to have universal applicability. The more undetermined a representation is, the more likely we can make universal judgments about them precisely because the more determined a representation is the more *particular* it is as well. Indeed, for what Kant needs the Categories to do, he must argue that intuitions are almost completely undetermined, otherwise the Categories' *a priori* relationship to intuitions collapses.

But what does it mean to be a *pure* concept of the understanding? The Categories are pure insofar as they contain no empirical content. The empirical concept of dog, for example, contains determinations that are grounded in experience and thus not a pure concept. The Categories are pure because they are not grounded in experience, and indeed Kant wants to argue that they contain nothing experiential. But how the Categories are also characterized as concepts is puzzling. Indeed, in similar passages Kant calls the Categories functions, and, in general, we do not conceive of concepts as functions. We have already highlighted the differences between the Categories and concepts as such, and I think the differences between the two make Kant's characterization of the Categories as concepts difficult to accept. The Categories are functions that describe the synthesis of different representations in an intuition, and concepts subsume specific objects under them. I do not think it is useful to think of the Categories as concepts at all because their functions, the things that we are concerned with when talking about Categories and concepts, are fundamentally different. Kant insists on calling the Categories concepts, but what the Categories actually represent are the relations between representations and not determined objects of intuitions. This is just what Kant means when he says that the functions of the Categories are a subject of transcendental logic;³ the categories abstract from objects to the synthesis of representations in general. Once we can stop thinking of the Categories as concepts and start considering them simply as logical functions I think that much confusion can be avoided.

But what is the "transcendental content" that Kant thinks is added to the synthesis by the Categories? This transcendental content is not really fully explained, but there are several features of it that we can identify. First, this content cannot be empirical

because it is transcendental, so content like colors, shapes, and sizes are not what Kant is referring to. This makes sense when we remember that the Categories concern the synthesis of representations and not those representations themselves, and this is also the next point. Whatever transcendental content is added by the Categories it must concern the synthesis of representations. Again the specifics of each Category are really not that important, but we can imagine that the Category of Plurality will characterize the synthesis of several representations as the synthesis of several particulars contained within a singular synthesis. The reason this content is, in fact, transcendental is because it does not concern the objects represented in the representations, but the synthesis of the representations themselves. This distinction may not be entirely clear, but we should consider the Category not applying to some single object or representation of an object, for what would it mean for Plurality of representations to be represented in a single representation? The Categories only make sense when we consider them as characterizing the synthesis of several different representations.

This is a difficult point, but it is essential to understand why Kant needs the Categories to apply to the synthesis of representations and not to the representations themselves. Kant must ensure that not only is the empirical content of a representation (or the objects in the world outside of the understanding) preserved in some sense, while still maintaining the objectivity of our synthesis of these representations. Since the Categories concern the synthesis of the representations, the empirical content of the representations themselves can remain unaffected by the categorical determination, so we can maintain content from the world outside of us. But we can maintain objectivity because we can determine the synthesis through the understanding *a priori* in relation to the synthesis of that external content. In the end, Kant may not actually be able to salvage the situation and maintain objectivity and empirical content, but we can at least understand why the method of applying the Categories to the synthesis of representation is a good attempt anyway.

Kant seems to be using the Schematism to describe how we can, *in general*, objectively apply the Categories to experience, but gives little with regard to the specifics of that action, *in concreto*. Even though he does describe each schema for each Category, it is fair to say that these descriptions are lacking to the point of almost complete uselessness except for very general indications about what Kant thinks about Schemata in general.⁴ Further, immediately before the Schematism chapter, in its introduction (A 130-6/B 169-75), Kant argues that the power of judgment is not something that can be learned or explained, and later calls the Schematism (the doctrine of the power of judgment) “a hidden art in the depths of the human soul” (A 141/B 180). So we can see that Kant may not have had the highest of hopes in explaining, in detail, the particular action of the schematism, or the power of judgment, but that instead he wanted to simply explain the process in general.⁵

Kant characterizes Schema as the “third thing” which is homogeneous both with an appearance and our concepts, and that “[t]his mediating representation must be pure (without anything empirical) and yet intellectual on the one hand and sensible on the other” (A 138/B 177). To argue that the schema must be non-empirical and sensible may seem initially to be contradictory, or at least confusing. Kant means that there is no empirical content in the schema, but that it is sensible insofar as it is determined by inner sensibility, i.e. Time. So Time acts as the bridge between the manifold of intuitions and the concepts of the understanding because both are subject to the transcendental determination of Time.

Here Kant also most explicitly, although by no means clearly, states what the Schematism allows us to accomplish: “Hence an application of the category to appearances becomes possible by means of the transcendental time-determination which, as the schema of the concept of the understanding, mediates the subsumption of the latter under the former” (A 139/B 178). The “latter” and “former” refer to “appearances” and “category” respectively. So the claim is that the schema of the category allows us to subsume the appearance under the category through a transcendental time-determination. Further, Kant describes what he means by schema: “Now this representation of a general procedure of the imagination for providing a concept with its image is what I call the schema for this concept” (A 140/B 179-80). An important distinction is to be made between the representation of the “general procedure of the imagination” and the “image” that the imagination is providing. Kant is saying that the schema is the procedure, and not the image itself.

What can we learn from these two passages? We need to understand that the Schemata are different from the Categories and intuitions, and that the Schemata are procedures of application, and not the object of the application itself. Kant’s unfortunate use of the word image in the second passage needs to be explained. He continually argues that the Schemata are not images, or pictures, or anything like that, but this point is obvious. What is not obvious is that in the procedure of application of appearance under category (again, schema), the appearance is not really an image either. What Kant is arguing is that the schema allows the subsumption of the manifold of intuition (organized by Time in all cases, and Space in outer sense) in general. This is painfully abstract and requires an explanation of several key concepts.

First, how are we to understand subsumption as such? Subsumption, in general logical terms, is something like the action of understanding a particular being an instance of a universal. For example, an act of subsumption is required when I understand that dog is a particular instance of mammal. We say that “dog” is subsumed under “mammal.” In the Schematism chapter, however, the story is a little more complex. Kant’s notion of subsumption does not involve particular objects of representation here. Kant is concerned with the subsumption of the manifold under a Category. True, Kant is concerned with a *particular* manifold, namely the one given at whatever point, but it is

not as if this particular manifold is a particular of the universal Category. Instead, Kant is arguing that in any manifold there are elements of it whose synthesis can be subsumed under the Categories. So in a sense the Schemata concern the subsumption of the synthesis of the manifold under a Category, but they are more generally the rule of how to create that synthesis. In short, the manifold contains elements that will be organized by the Categories, but how we are to organize which elements by which Category is the Schema. The process of organization is the Schema.

To use an example, Kant is not arguing that the Schema identifies in the manifold an example of, say, unity and then subsumes this particular example of unity under the Category of Unity. He is arguing that the Schema identifies relations between representations in the manifold in such a way that we can subsume these relations under the Categories. Kant's move to abstract from particular objects of intuitions to the relations between these objects can again be seen as the transcendental move. He attempts to abstract from the particular content of the intuition to the form of the intuition itself. This understanding of the Schemata is similar (and not accidentally) to Kant's understanding of the Categories. The Categories describe the relationship between objects in intuitions, and the Schemata concern the relationship between the Categories and that relationship between objects in intuitions.

Since Time is neither only empirical nor only intellectual, but in an important way both, we can use it to objectively ground the schematization of the Categories. The power of judgment does not need to add anything to the manifold of intuitions that is not already there from the Transcendental Aesthetic in order to apply the Categories to those intuitions. This idea is powerful. Problems with the objectivity of our judgments cannot be found in the application of the Categories to intuitions through the Schemata, but can only be found in the Transcendental Aesthetic. Once Kant has convinced us that Space and Time are *a priori* in intuitions, the argument of the schematism is not difficult to accomplish. All of our representations occur in Time, and how our representations are related and how these relations occur in Time define how the power of judgment is to schematize the Categories onto our intuitions.

The view of conceptuality that I am offering is a reminder that the Categories are transcendental concepts and the consequences of that notion. As I argued earlier, we must be clear on the point that the Categories are different than concepts as such in just the way that we would expect from Kant, i.e. they are transcendental concepts. Their transcendental nature abstracts from the particular representations in intuition in general to the relationships between representations. This point allows us to solve (or at least postpone) problems that arise when dealing with the undetermined manifold of intuition. Further, this understanding of the Categories allows us to approach the Schemata in a reasonable way so that they can still function objectively, but also in a way that can connect experience up with thought.

Representations in the manifold occur in Time. This is established by the Transcendental Aesthetic. Relations between representations in the manifold should thus also occur in Time. This is, indeed, just what it means to be a representation in the manifold, an appearance in time. Insofar as the relationships between representations occur in time, it is entirely possible that we are able to identify in what ways those relationships occur through time. The power of this approach to the manifold is that we are not required to know anything about the representations or their relationships themselves, except for the way in which they persist (or not) through time. The content of the representations proper do not need to play any role in our apprehension of them in order for us to understand their determination in time.

Because of this, Kant is able to maintain that the process of the schematization of the Categories still occurs *a priori* and that from it we can gain objective knowledge. Since representations are determined by time *a priori* there is no content about which we are making judgments that will make our judgments have *a posteriori* character. But because the representations themselves are *a posteriori* we still are making judgments about the world as it is empirically. Since, however, the schematization of the Category on the manifold is not dependent on the empirical content of representations (or the empirical content of their relations) and instead only concerns the forms of intuition as given in Time *a priori* we can still make *a priori* judgments about the manifold of intuition.

In order for this to work, however, we must remember that the Schemata are not concepts, or objects, or anything of that nature, but are rules for how the power of judgment is to proceed in its application of the Categories. Kant must show that the rules for application are also *a priori* in order for the system to hold together. We can think about this in at least two different ways, but we should understand that the rules of schematization of the Categories are to be found in the nature of the Categories themselves and not in the Schematism proper. I do not mean that the rules appear in the section on the Categories in the book, but that we do not need to go farther than the Categories to understand how each will be applied to intuition.

The first way to understand the rules for the application of the Categories is through a transcendental deduction like the one Kant attempts. I do not think this is the clearest way to go about the issue, and I am not entirely convinced that as it stands in the *Critique* that Kant actually successfully completes his deduction. But there is a more straightforward way to think about the Categories which I think gets to the point that Kant was driving at as well. This way is something like conceptual analysis, but understood in a broad sense. Take the Category of Necessity, for example. What I take Kant to be arguing is that necessity is just the occurrence of representations at all times. The important implication is that “necessity” does not have any thicker metaphysical meaning besides just the existence of representations at all times. What we mean when we talk about “necessity” is just this notion, and not anything more.

This may seem like it does not do justice to the concept of necessity. Our concept of necessity just does seem to have more to it than just the existence of representations at all times. There is a sense in which necessity does more metaphysical heavy lifting than this. We see the effects of this in attempts like the ontological argument. But this sense is not valid, and when we take a look at the Category of Actuality, say, we can see why. Actuality is representations at a certain time. This description seems to be *exactly* what we mean when we talk about actuality. Actuality is simply the existence of something at some time. What could be different about necessity and actuality such that the Category of Necessity could be a more metaphysically loaded concept than the Category of Actuality? There is no fundamental difference between the two except for their different prescriptions for time-determinations.

A similar procedure could be used with the other Categories, but I will not go into detail with those. Kant's point is that the fundamental concepts through which we organize our experience are all grounded in different determinations of Time; we can give these concepts any names we want, but there are still a finite number of combinations that will give unique determinations of the manifold of intuitions. We can call it Necessity or any other word, but the determination that we are talking about is the determination of representations at all times. Each Category has a different combination of representation in Time, and therefore each Category has a different function in the transcendental combination of the manifold of intuition.

This description of the Categories does not seem to carry with it, at least at first glance, the power of a transcendental deduction. But if we examine how we are actually describing each Category, we see that it is, indeed, a conclusion from a transcendental argument. Experience is only possible if we determine the manifold of intuition in certain ways with respect to Time. The different ways that are possible to determine the manifold we call Categories. The procedure by which we decide how a particular manifold which is given to us is determined through the Categories is called a Schema. I think that despite its differences from Kant's attempt at a transcendental argument, my conclusions and really my approach is at heart the same. In any case, the validity of the Categories can be reasonably established if we consider them and the Schemata in the way that I have described.

I have attempted to construct a view of the Categories and Schemata in such a way that will lend credence to the possibility of their *a priori* validity. I have attempted to avoid representationalist approaches by excising pictorial interpretations of the Schemata from the Schematism chapter and focusing more on their procedural rule-based aspect. I argued that if we remind ourselves of the fact that while the Categories are indeed concepts, but that they are transcendental concepts we can avoid an equivocation between them and empirical concepts. In doing this, we should be able to see how the Categories apply transcendentially to representations and not representations of objects as such. I think in this way we can still maintain the benefits of transcendental idealism

while avoiding some of the pitfalls that objections like the form/matter distinction highlight. Even if we have only pushed back the problems to the Transcendental Aesthetic (I think we have done more than that), we have still done much to show that the Categories and Schemata are not the source of the problems.

¹ All passages from the *Critique of Pure Reason* are from Guyer's and Wood's translation on Cambridge University Press, 2008.

² See A 89-91/B 122-3 for Kant's analysis on this point, also A 100-1 in the A Deduction proper.

³ A 78-9/B 104.

⁴ There are a few exceptions, but many of Kant's descriptions of the twelve pure Schemata are painfully obscure.

⁵ Pippin also addresses the issue of how specifically Kant addresses the action of the power of judgment as opposed to simply describing its ground in objectivity. See Pippin, Robert. *Kant's Theory of Form*. Yale University Press, Ann Arbor: 1982. Chapter 5.