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The Ontological Status of Events in Kant

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¶1. When we think about Kant's discussion of objects we are most likely to focus on ordinary physical objects—that is, things such as a house, a table, a chair, a lion, a tiger, and a bear, etc. It is important to note, however, that these are not the only type of objects Kant had in mind. According to Kant events, such as a ship floating down a river or water freezing, are *objects as well*. The Second Analogy is the starting point for Kant's discussion of events as objects of representations. In the Second Analogy, Kant makes it clear that the notion of an object of representations has a central role to play in the proof of the causal principle. In the first paragraph in A, Kant writes that:

¶2. > The apprehension of the manifold of appearance is always successive. The representations of the parts follow one another. Whether they also follow in the object is a second point for reflection which is not contained in the first. Now it is true that everything and even every representation in so far as one is conscious of it can be called an object. It is a matter for deeper investigation, however, what meaning this word has with regard to appearances, not in so far as they (as representations) are objects, but rather only in so far as they signify an object. [1]

¶3. Kant, of course, regards himself as having already made significant progress in this "deeper investigation." For it was back in the transcendental deduction (in A) that Kant writes, "And here it is necessary to make clear what is meant by the expression 'an object of representations' " (A104). What we find, says Kant, is that "the object is viewed as that which ensures that our cognitions (*Erkenntnisse*) are not haphazard or arbitrary" (A104).

¶4. Kant's point is straightforward. The object is that which grounds the objectivity of cognition. If I take some set of my representations to have an object, then I represent my cognition in this case as having been constrained by the features of the object. On the other hand, if I regard some set of my representations as having no object, then I represent myself as having been constrained only by my imagination.

¶5. Now it may be easy enough to see how objects in the ordinary sense-that is, tables, chairs, lions, tigers, and bears, etc.—can ground the objectivity of cognition, but how will this work when we are dealing with Kant's objects of representations? For we need to remember that, according to Kant, an object "is no thing in itself, but rather only an appearance, that is, representation" (A191/B236).

¶6. If this is true, then how can objects (which are themselves representations) be "that which ensures that our cognitions are not haphazard or arbitrary." Kant's answer is that in order for representations to be objects in this sense they themselves must not be associated in a haphazard or arbitrary way. That is, the representations must themselves be connected *according to rules*. In other words, representations, "as perceptions only signify a real object ... in so far as they are, in relation to space and time, connected and determinable ... according to the rules of the unity of experience" (A494-5/B522-3). These rules must specify one determinate connection of representations and thereby distinguish this connection of representations from all others. For, as Kant puts it in the Second Analogy:

¶7. > appearance, in contrast with the representations of apprehension, can only be represented as an object distinct from them if it stands under a rule, which distinguishes it from every other apprehension, and makes necessary one manner of connection of the manifold. (A191/B236)

¶8. In explaining how this is supposed to work, Kant first uses "the appearance of a house" as an example. Using Kant's example of a house, I want to explain, more concretely, the sort of thing I take to be involved in being subject to a rule which mandates one determinate connection of the manifold. [2]

¶9. The first requirement is that the house must have one particular spatial temporal location. At a given time throughout the duration of its existence the house must be located in one spatial region. This of course does not rule out the possibility of the house being located in different spatial regions at different times; for example, a house which is at one time located at 3 Bagshot Row may at some other time be located at 221B Baker street, but what it does rule out is the possibility that the house has more than one spatial location at any given time. It also rules out the possibility that at some time in which it exists the house has no spatial location at all.

¶10. Secondly, at any given time in which it exists the house must be composed of some one determinate set of parts. This does not rule out the possibility that the house is composed of different sets of parts at different times; for example, a house which has only two bedrooms on one occasion may on another occasion have three bedrooms, but what it does rule out is the possibility that at any given time the house is composed of more than one set of parts. It also rules out the possibility that at some time in which it exists, the house is composed of the empty set of parts.

¶11. Thirdly, at any given time in which it exists, the parts of the house must be made of some determinate type of material. This does not rule out the possibility that at different times the parts are made of different materials; for example, at one time the walls may be made only of stone, but at some other time they may be made of brick, but what it does rule out is the possibility that at any given time, the parts have more than one determinate composition. It also rules out the possibility that at some time in which the house exists, the parts are not made of anything at all. [3]

¶12. Fourthly, within the spatial region in which the house is located, the various parts of the house must be connected with each other in some one determinate way. This, of course, does not rule out the possibility of the parts of the house being arranged in different ways at different times; for example, at one time the kitchen may be located on the south side of the second floor, but at some other time it may be located on the east side of the first floor, but what it does rule out is the possibility of the parts of the house being arranged in more than one way at any given time. It also rules out the possibility that at some time in which the house exists the parts of the house are not connected in any determinate way at all.

¶13. There are two things which should be noted with regard to being subject to a rule in this sense. First, just as the unity of apperception does not require (to misquote Kant) "that the *I think* must accompany all of my representations," being subject to a rule in this sense does not require any cognizer to actually know the determinate manner in which the manifold is connected. That is, using the four requirements above, being subject to a rule does not require that any cognizer actually knows the spatial temporal location of the object or the parts which make up the object at a time, or the material composition of those parts or the arrangement of those parts. Once again in line with the unity of apperception, which requires, to accurately quote Kant, "that it must be possible for the I think to accompany all of my representations" (B131), being subject to a rule requires that the connection of the manifold is determinable. That is, the object must have a determinable location, a determinable set of parts, a determinable material composition, and a determinable arrangement of parts.

¶14. Second, in listing the above four requirements for being subject to a rule, I did so predominately with ordinary physical objects in mind. What we want to see, however, is whether these requirements also adequately capture the requirements for an event (that is, a succession of appearances) being subject to a rule in the manner appropriate for its being an object of representations. Using his example of a ship floating down a river, Kant will argue that these requirements do not adequately capture the requirements for an event's being an object of representations. There is an important difference between ordinary objects and events which these requirements do not capture.

¶15. Kant asks us to suppose "I see a ship floating down the river" (A192/B237). Do I represent myself as having perceived a succession of appearances, the event of the ship floating down the river, simply because I represent "my perception of its position downstream" as following "the perception of its position higher up in the course of the river?" (A192/B237). Kant says his house example shows us that the answer to this question is "no." Suppose, in a series of perceptions, I see a house. Now Kant would say I must represent my perceptions as having some order-that is, one perception follows another perception. So perhaps I represent my perception of the east wing of the house as following my perception of the south wing which in turn follows my perception of the west wing. Although I represent my perceptions as following each other in this way, I do not also represent the east wing itself as following the south wing which in turn follows the west wing. On the contrary, I represent the east wing, the south wing, and the west wing as coexistent parts of the one house.

¶16. Although in both cases my perceptions follow one another, there is, according to Kant, a characteristic which the series of my perceptions of the ship floating downstream has which the series of my perceptions of the house lacks. This feature is the irreversibility of the perceptions involved. That is, not only do I represent my perception of the ship downstream as following my perception of the ship upstream, but I also represent it as being "impossible that in the apprehension of this appearance the ship should first be perceived downstream and [only] afterwards higher up in the river" (A192/B237). My perception of the house, however, is subject to no such constraint, for:

¶17. > my perceptions in the apprehension could begin at the top (Spitze) and end at the ground (Boden), but could also begin below and end above; similarly [I could] apprehend the manifold of empirical intuition from the right or from the left. (A192/B237-8)

¶18. I take the following two claims to capture Kant's claims concerning the reversibility or irreversibility of perceptions in the two cases. In the case of the perception of the house, I must be able to represent the situation as being such that while keeping the perceptual conditions and the membership of the series of my perceptions constant if the series of my perceptions had been ordered differently, then I would have still perceived the house. In the case of the perception of the ship floating down the river, however, I must represent the situation as being such that while keeping the perceptual conditions and the membership of the series of my perceptions constant if the series of my perceptions had been ordered differently, then I would not have still perceived the ship floating downstream. That is to say, in the case of the perception of the ship floating down the river, I must represent the situation as being such that while keeping the perceptual conditions and the membership of my series of perceptions constant, if I also keep the event constant, then I could not have had my series of perceptions in any other order. [4]

¶19. Suppose I represent my perception of the house in the following way: first I looked at the front door, then I looked at the chimney, then I looked at the bay window in the living room, then I looked at the easternmost window on the second floor, and finally I looked at the garage door. Now suppose I had started my perusal by first looking at the bay window in the living room, then I looked at the chimney, then I looked at the front door, then I looked at the garage and then finally I looked at the easternmost window on the second floor. If this had been the order of my series of perceptions would the house still have been the object of my perceptions as it was in the first case? Yes it would. So it seems in the case of the house, while allowing the ordering of the series of my perceptions to vary in the two cases, I am able to keep the membership of that series, the perceptual conditions, and the object of my perceptions, constant between the two cases.

¶20. Suppose I represent my perception of the ship floating down the river in the following way: first I looked at the ship in front of the dock which is at the highest navigable part of the river, then I looked at the ship in front of the castle which is two hundred meters downstream from the dock, then I looked at the ship in front of the village which is three hundred meters downstream from the castle, then I looked at the ship in front of the farm which is two hundred meters downstream from the village, and finally I looked at the ship at the point where the river joins the ocean which is four hundred meters downstream from the farm. Now suppose I had started my perusal of the ship floating down the river by looking at the ship in front of the village. Could I have then gone on to look at the ship in front of the dock, then in front of the castle, then in front of the farm, and finally at the point the river joins the ocean? The answer is "no." In its floating down the river the ship arrives in front of the village only after it has already passed in front of the dock and castle. So if when I had first looked at the ship it was in front of the village, this means I would have already missed my chance to look at the ship while it was in front of the dock or in front of the castle. In fact any ordering of this series other than the original ordering would face this same

problem. So it seems I could only have had all five of these perceptions if I first looked at the ship at the dock, then at the castle, then at the village, then at the farm and finally at the ocean. That is, I can have all five perceptions only in the original order.

¶21. Of what importance is it that, *as opposed to the house example*, in the ship example we must represent our perceptions as being irreversible? Or, to put the question in the terms Kant uses at the end of the paragraph in which the ship example is introduced, of what importance is it, that, as opposed to the house example, in the ship example "there is a rule to be found and it makes necessary the order in which the perceptions follow one another-in the apprehension of this appearance" (A193/B238)?

¶22. The irreversibility of my perceptions of the ship floating down the river is important because this is supposed to show that in this case I represent myself as not having had control over the order of my series of perceptions. Instead, in this case, I represent the order of my series of perceptions as being *controlled by the succession of appearances which was perceived*-that is, the ship floating downstream. That is, I represent this succession of appearances as being responsible for the order of the series of my perceptions. This is what Kant means when he says that "in our case the *subjective succession* of apprehension must be derived from the objective succession of the appearances" (A193/B238).

¶23. When we put together the irreversibility of our perceptions with what we have just said about the source or ground of this order, we can see the most important result from the ship example, namely, that we are treating this succession of appearances-the ship floating downstream-as an object of representations.

¶24. When we must also remember that in order for an appearance to be an object in this sense-that is, in the sense of being "that which ensures that our cognitions are not haphazard or arbitrary"-the appearance itself must not be connected haphazardly or arbitrarily, but instead it must be connected according to rules. In other words, as we have already seen, in order for an appearance to be an object of representations it must be subject to "a rule which distinguishes it from every other apprehension, and makes necessary one manner of connection of the manifold" (A191/B236).

¶25. With the ship example now in hand, we are in a better position to use the ship example to investigate what being subject to a rule that mandates one determinate connection of the manifold will amount to, when dealing with a succession of appearances rather than an ordinary physical object.

¶26. The first requirement is that the succession of the ship floating down the river must occur in a determinate spatial region and during a particular temporal period. What this rules out is the possibility that it occurs either in more than one determinate spatial region or during two or more noncontinuous temporal periods. It also rules out the possibility that it actually occurs, but either it does not occur in any spatial region or it does not occur during any temporal period.

¶27. The second requirement is that the event of the ship floating down the river must be composed of some one determinate set of parts. Here a part of the succession would be defined as the ship floating in a particular determinate spatial position. So, for example, the succession might be composed of the ship floating in front of the dock, the ship floating in front of the village, and the ship floating at the ocean. What this rules out is the possibility that the event of the ship floating down the river is composed of more than one determinate set of parts. This also rules out the possibility that although the ship floats down the river, it is composed of the empty set of parts.

¶28. Thirdly, the parts of the succession of the ship floating down the river must be connected with each other in one determinate manner. So, given that this is a succession, this will mean that the parts must be connected with each other in some determinate temporal order. What this rules out is the possibility that they are connected in more than one determinate temporal order. It also rules out the possibility that they are not connected in any determinate temporal order at all. [5]

¶29. Kant's choice of the ship example as an example of a succession of appearances makes things a little interesting. This is because Kant's "official" definition of a succession of appearances seems to be one state of a substance following another state of a substance,[6] but here in the ship example we have a succession of appearances, and it does not seem that we have one state of an object followed by a different state of the object. Instead, we have an object changing not states but spatial positions. So the conclusions about the requirements for a succession of appearances being subject to a rule will need some revision after the examination of what can be concluded about successions of appearances in general as opposed to this specific case. As we will see, however, the required revisions will not force us to go in any significantly new direction, but they will be needed in order to make clear how what was said in the ship case can be formulated for successions of appearances which fit Kant's "official" definition.

¶30. Near the end of the second edition of Transcendental Deduction, Kant discusses first the apprehension of an ordinary physical object and then discusses the apprehension of a succession of appearances. The example he chooses for an ordinary physical object is the same as it is in the Second Analogy-a house. His example of a succession of appearances, however, is not a ship floating down the river, but instead it is the freezing of water. Kant says "when I (in another example) perceive the freezing of the water, I apprehend two states (that of fluidity and of solidity) and these as standing to one another in a relation of time" (B162).

¶31. This example does fit the official definition, and it is the example I will use in my reexamination of the requirements for a succession of appearances being subject to a rule which mandates one determinate connection of the manifold.

¶32. The first requirement is that this freezing of the water must occur in a determinate spatial region, and during a determinate temporal period. This does not rule out the possibility that the water changes spatial position while it is freezing. For example, a half-cup of water in a canteen might freeze while it is being carried on a ten-mile hike in sub-zero temperatures. In such a case, since this freezing is not instantaneous, the spatial region in which this freezing occurs will consist in a spatial path rather than a fixed spatial position. This also does not rule out the possibility that this same quantity of water freezes again during some other temporal period. For example, this half-cup of water which froze in the canteen might melt when it is set in front of a fire, but then re-freeze on the next day's hike. In such a case the water freezes twice.

¶33. What this requirement does rule out, however, is the possibility that this particular freezing of the water occurs either in more than one determinate spatial region or during two or more noncontinuous temporal periods. It also rules out the possibility that this freezing of the water actually occurs, but either it does not occur in any spatial region at all or it does not occur during any temporal period whatsoever.

¶34. Secondly, the event of the freezing of the water must be composed of some one determinate set of parts. Here a part of the succession would be defined as the water being in some particular determinate state, in some particular determinate spatial position. So, for example, the event might be composed of the water being in a liquid state at the trail head, the water being in a semisolid state one mile from the top of the mountain, and the water being in a solid state at the top of the mountain. What this rules out is the possibility that the event of the water freezing is composed of more than one determinate set of parts. This also rules out the possibility that although the water freezes, it is composed of the empty set of parts.

¶35. Thirdly, the parts of the succession of the water freezing must be connected with each other in one determinate manner-given that this is a succession of one state following another, this will mean that the parts of the succession of the water freezing must be connected with each other in some determinate temporal order. What this rules out is the possibility that they are connected in more than one determinate temporal order. It also rules out the possibility that they are not connected in any determinate temporal order whatsoever. [7]

¶36. So, events are objects of representations, and they have their own unique set of requirements for being objects of representations. What does this tell us about their ontological status? Well, I think the important thing is that for Kant events cannot be reduced to the same type of thing as an ordinary object. With ordinary objects we do not have any provision for the determinate temporal connection of the parts, but this is essential for an event. In the case of an ordinary object there is nothing in the object which constrains our subjective succession of apprehension. That is, with an ordinary object there is nothing which prevents our cognition from being haphazard or arbitrary with regard to temporal succession. Clearly our cognition is constrained in terms of spatial connections, but in terms of temporal connection this is not true. Temporally speaking, our cognition of an ordinary object is arbitrary-no spatial part must be cognized in a particular temporal order. For in an ordinary object there is no particular temporal succession which is the object of our cognition.

¶37. If we try to reduce the requirements for an event's being an object of representations to the same requirements for an ordinary physical object, then we leave off what is essential for something's being an event. For an event, what is essential is that the object of our cognition is a particular temporal succession. This is what Kant means when he writes that "in our case the subjective succession of apprehension must be derived from the *objective succession* of the appearances" (A193/B238), So, clearly for Kant events must have an ontological status which is at least in some respect independent of ordinary objects.

¶38. Although events in some way have an independent status, we need to be clear that for Kant they won't be completely independent of ordinary objects. Whether we are dealing with an event like a ship floating down the river, which primarily involves a change of place, or an event like the water freezing, which primarily involves a change of state, the requirements for specifying the determinate temporal succession-that is, the object of representation-will always involve an ordinary object (or objects).

¶39. So, on Kant's picture we are left with two different types of objects of representations: ordinary objects and events, and they cannot be reduced one to the other-or at least as I have argued here, on Kant's view events cannot be reduced to ordinary objects.

END NOTES

1. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag (1976), A189-90/B234-5. All translations from the *Critique* are my own. The German text is from *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Immanuel Kant, *Kant's gesammelte Schriften., Königlichen Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, ed.* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.), 1902.

2. In what follows I will discuss being subject to a rule which mandates one determinate connection of the manifold in empirical terms. Ultimately I think we would have to carry out the discussion in transcendental terms, and so these rules would have to be spelled out strictly in terms of representations and their connections. I think, however, it will be easier to understand the nature of these rules if we stick with empirical terms.

3. It should be noted that this third requirement could really be included within the second requirement. That is, in the second requirement the definition of part would strictly speaking include the material the part is composed of. When we specify the determinate parts, instead of bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, etc we would have wood bedroom, tile bathroom, brick kitchen etc. I have spelled them out here as two requirements simply for the ease of exposition.

4. I have spelled these out being careful to speak of the situation as I represent it and the order of my perceptions as I represent it, and so on. I have done this in order to make it clear that I do not interpret Kant as taking any of these things a s some sort of uninterpreted given-even the order of my perceptions is something which I must represent to my to myself.

5. It should be noted that, just as in the house case, being subject to a rule in this sense does not require any cognizer to actually know the determinate manner in which the manifold is connected. That is, using the three requirements above, being subject to a rule does not require that any cognizer actually knows the spatial temporal location of the succession of appearances or the membership of the set of parts of that succession, or the temporal ordering of those parts. Once again in line with what was said in the house case, being subject to a rule requires that the connection of the manifold is determinable. That is, the object must have a determinable location, a determinable set of parts, and a determinable temporal ordering of parts.

6. At B233 Kant says that "appearances follow one another, that is, a state of things is at one time the opposite of which was in the previous state," and at A187/B231 he says "a certain determination [of a substance] ceases and another begins."

7. It should be noted once again that, just as in the house case, being subject to a rule in this sense does not require any cognizer to actually know the determinate manner in which the manifold is connected. That is, using the three requirements above, being subject to a rule does not require that any cognizer actually knows the spatial temporal location of the succession of appearances or the membership of the set of parts of that succession, or the temporal ordering of those parts. Once again in line with what was said in the house case, being subject to a rule requires that the connection of the manifold is determinable. That is, the object must have a determinable location, a determinable set of parts, and a determinable temporal ordering of parts.

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