

24.201 Topics in History of Philosophy: KANT
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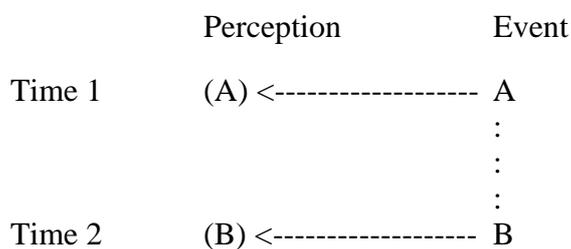
Causality and the Second Analogy (B233-A211/B256)

1. *Background on causality.* The proposition ‘every event has a cause’ is synthetic *a priori*, contrary to a) the empiricist Locke who thinks it is synthetic *a posteriori*, and b) the rationalist Wolff who assimilates it to the principle of non-contradiction, therefore analytic *a priori*. Hume said it was not *a posteriori* (contrary to Locke), not analytic (contrary to the rationalists), so we should consign it to the flames.

2. *Reminder about the Copernican project.* Kant says it’s not that there's something about the objects that makes the experience possible, but rather, there's something about the experience that makes objects possible. It’s not that objects fix the way we think, but how we think fixes objects. We can think of the Analogies as attempts to spell out the details of the general project of the Transcendental Deduction.

3. *The Second Analogy.* ‘All alterations take place in conformity with the law of connection of cause and effect’ (B232). ‘Everything that happens, that is, begins to be, presupposes something according to which it follows according to a rule’ (A189). One way to understand the argument is in terms of a starting assumption apparently shared with a sceptic about causation, namely that we do have experience of objective events; what the sceptic denies is experience of a ‘necessary connection’, a causal relation, holding between those events. Kant’s strategy will be to argue that experience of objective events itself requires or presupposes experience of a necessary connection. So he develops his argument through the idea that objective experience requires the distinguishing of subjective and objective time orders. How do we mark the difference between perception of the house, whose parts are co-existent, and of the boat, whose states are successive? *Order irreversibility* is the criterion of the difference between those two objective time orders. Causality as irreversibility of the time order. Causality as that which makes experience possible, i.e. experience of the difference between things and events.

Take 1. Strawson famously objects that Kant’s argument commits a ‘fallacy of numbing grossness’. Consider this schema, where letters indicate an event, and parentheses indicate perception of that event.



For example, let ‘A’ be the throwing of a ball, and ‘B’ be the ball breaking the window; ‘(A)’ is the perception of the ball being thrown, and ‘(B)’ is the perception of it breaking the window. Strawson thinks the following principle is plausible (with some qualifications):

Irreversibility of Perceptions: Necessarily, if B happens after A, (B) happens after (A). Given that B happened after A, the perception of B had to happen after A. In our example: if breaking the window happens after throwing the ball, the perception of the window breaking likewise happens after the perception of the ball being thrown. That is what this simple point about the irreversibility of perceptions really comes down to.

But instead of sticking with this point about the ‘irreversibility’ of certain perceptions, given the sequence of events, Kant proceeds to a conclusion about causation, a relation between the events.

Causal necessity: A causally necessitates B.

There are two errors, according to Strawson: Kant shifts the application of the word ‘necessary’, from perceptions to events; and also changes the sense of ‘necessary’, from a conditional conceptual necessity, to causal necessity. He changes the subject (events instead of perceptions), and he changes the meanings (causation instead of conceptual necessity).

(See Strawson’s *Bounds of Sense*, 137-8)

We will consider next time whether there is an interpretation of Kant’s argument which escapes this famous objection.