

Research Article

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The Temporal Difference and Timelessness in Kant and Heidegger

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Abstract: I spell out two theses, one shared by Kant and Heidegger, the other Kant's alone: (1) there is a difference between “within-time-ness” (Innerzeitigkeit) and original or pure time (the temporal difference); (2) the temporal difference is articulated by a self-conscious act not bound by time. While each agrees that the “time-less” original or pure time has limits within which particular temporal determinations have their significance, Kant goes further in asserting that the pure ‘I’ must cognize the determinate boundaries of original or pure time if objective cognition is to be possible. The ‘I’ thus rejects time as a horizon of its own significance. An understanding of this argument suggests why Kant's position is not as obviously susceptible to Heidegger's criticism: not only does Kant positively argue that the ‘I’ is atemporal, but the content of this argument tells us why it is impossible for the ‘I’ to be ‘extant’ or a superadded representation in need of unification with temporality. Finally, it suggests that the dispute between Kant's and Heidegger's philosophical orientations rests not on whether temporality has been understood, but on how the ultimate conditions of intelligibility relate to their limits.

Keywords: time, temporality, Kant, Heidegger

Heidegger's intensive study of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the 1920s non-accidentally coincided with his own work on the problematic of *Being and Time*. As he writes in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*:

[...] the manner of questioning from *Being and Time* came into play as an anticipation of my attempted interpretation of Kant. Kant's text became a refuge, as I sought in Kant an advocate for the question of Being which I posed ... the Kant book remains an introduction, attempted by means of a questionable digression, to the further questionability which persists concerning the Question of Being set forth in *Being and Time*.¹

Kant provides the germ of a groundbreaking understanding of being, because he exposes cognition as resting on and infused with an *a priori* representation of time.² For both, this representation is not cognition of an object, but instead a kind of self-understanding which opens up the possibility of relating to objects. Unsurprisingly, then, Heidegger applauds Kant's elaboration of time as the human being's activity of “pure

¹ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, xvii–xviii.

² “Kant is the first and only one who traversed a stretch of the path toward investigating the dimension of temporality – or allowed himself to be driven there by the compelling force of the phenomena themselves” (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 23). Cf. also: “The investigations into time by Aristotle and Augustine are the important ones, and they are decisive for subsequent periods. More unawares than with clear intent, Kant later pushed the problem furthest into the dimension of the truly philosophical problematic” (Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 199).

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self-affection”³ and the thought that this activity is a source from which emerges the very possibility of relating to phenomena at all.

But this convergence also occasions their divergence, and Kant’s success is really only a limited success, in Heidegger’s eyes. At the climax of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, it is Kant’s failure to recognize temporality as the ultimate condition of intelligibility which most clearly distances the critical philosophy from the allegedly more “fundamental” ontology of *Being and Time*. This climactic point is reached with Heidegger’s discussion of the relation between the “I” of pure apperception and time. Here, we find the most explicit criticism of Kant for abandoning the centrality of time for cognition. Whereas Kant recognizes time as the basic form of our sensible intuition, Heidegger accuses him of failing to investigate what kind of being time has (i.e., its “temporality”) such that it can be united with pure thought. In Heidegger’s reading, Kant therefore “shrinks back” from investigating temporality.⁴ Despite the insight that time is the ur-form of human sensible intuition, and although the “A” edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* may be read as holding that the temporally structured imagination is the root of the unity of cognition, in the “B” edition Kant appears to retreat from the natural result of this thought, maintaining instead that the transcendental “I” of pure reason (1) is exempt from the conditions of time (A539/B567, A556/B584) and (2) is the ground of original or pure time (the “formal intuition” of time, B161n.). As we will see, it is especially the latter point which Heidegger understands as the reason for asserting the former. Since the unity of time is originally made possible by the “I,” Kant thinks the “I” is beyond time, and hence timeless.

While Heidegger’s “existential” analytic of the human being (“Dasein”) purports to reveal temporality as the horizon of all intelligibility, it appears that for Kant it is rather the timeless self-conscious “I” which makes possible the intelligibility of any representation, including that of time.⁵ This alleged cleaving of the timeless subject from its temporal form of sensibility is diagnosed by Heidegger as a symptom of Kant’s implicitly traditional understanding of metaphysics, one where the human is still represented as substance, something merely “extant” and hence the constantly present thing underlying representation.⁶ Opposing this is Heidegger’s temporal conception of the human being as Dasein, which essentially projects itself upon its indefinitely open set of potentialities, thereby already being “ahead of itself” in this projection, but at the same time always already “thrown” into a situation. This concern with its situation and possibilities is not just a third-personal fact about an entity, but a self-interpreting activity of its situation and possibilities, and so a way of being concerned about its relation to time. Thus, the question “what is the human being?”⁷ brings Kant and Heidegger to the question of what the relation is between the human being and time.⁸ Still, commentators on both sides tend to leave untouched key questions about Kant’s timeless “I.” It is often acknowledged that the “I” of understanding or reason (the pure “I”) is not constrained by temporal conditions, in line with what Kant himself repeats. But it is less often explained what this means or how it is possible, given that this “I” cannot be cognized as a timeless object. Barring the claim that we have theoretical knowledge of its existence as a timeless thing, some may suggest that the pure “I,” and hence its timeless character, is parasitic on or even abstracted from a subject existing in time, and hence that the “I” presupposes a more original temporal determination of the subject. Others may regard its timeless aspect as a mere standpoint required in order

³ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, §34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, §38.

⁵ Heidegger also speaks of time as the horizon of the “meaning of being” [*Sinnes von Sein*] (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 235). The relation between *Sinn* (or “significance” [*Bedeutsamkeit*]) and “cognition” [*Erkenntnis*] cannot be tackled just yet, for I want to show that the answer is already in the background of Heidegger’s central critique of Kant.

⁶ Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 268.

⁷ Heidegger takes seriously the fact that Kant later adds precisely this question to his famous list of 3: “1. What can I know? 2. What should I do? 3. What may I hope?” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A804–5/B832–3). Kant then says that the question “What is man?” is the most fundamental (Kant, *The Jäsche Logic*, AA 9:25).

⁸ What I say here does call for two brief caveats. First, focusing on “early” Heidegger means that we are not considering the possible ways in which Heidegger’s views may have shifted (however subtly or radically) after this period. Second, my account of Heidegger does fall into line with the broad category of readings according to which early Heidegger was a temporal idealist. Cf. Blattner, *Heidegger’s Temporal Idealism*; Han-Pile, “Early Heidegger’s Appropriation of Kant;” Bruno, “Varieties of Transcendental Idealism;” Lambeth, *Heidegger’s Interpretation of Kant*.

to distinguish the rational and normative operations of reason from merely phenomenal and efficient-causal relations.⁹ Works on Heidegger's reading of Kant often pass over the crucial details of Kant's positive arguments for the timelessness of the "I," and how these arguments might have plausibility as a challenge to Heidegger's criticism.¹⁰ What I seek to do here is remedy this by considering not only what Heidegger's argument against the timeless "I" comes to, but also what he might be missing about Kant's positive argument for the claim that the "I" cannot be conditioned by time.

I spell out two theses, the first of which is shared by both thinkers, and the second of which is Kant's alone: (1) that a distinction must be drawn between "within-time-ness" (*Innerzeitigkeit*) and pure or original time (the *temporal difference*) and (2) that the temporal difference can only be articulated by a self-conscious act which is not bound by time. Regarding (1), I will make sense of Heidegger's dissatisfaction with Kant's timeless "I" by showing how he diagnoses Kant's reasons for endorsing it. In doing so, we will see that in fact both thinkers endorse the temporal difference. Regarding (2), I will explain why Kant nevertheless wouldn't accept Heidegger's diagnosis of his alleged mistake, and why he would maintain the timelessness of the "I." For Kant, there is not only "within-time-ness" and the unchanging ("timeless") temporal structure of time itself, but also an "I" which self-consciously rejects any temporal conditioning (an "atemporality" of the "I"). This brings to light the possibility of two distinct senses of timelessness: one corresponding to a mere lack of temporal determination, and one corresponding to a complete rejection of temporal conditioning. While Kant and Heidegger agree that the "timeless" form of time has limits that function like a "horizon" within which particular temporal determinations of objects can first emerge, Kant goes further in asserting that the pure "I" must cognize the determinate boundaries of time in order for objective cognition to be possible at all. The "I" thus rejects time as a horizon against which its own being is made intelligible. Understanding this argument suggests why Kant's position is not as obviously susceptible to Heidegger's criticism: not only does Kant positively argue that the "I" is atemporal, but the content of this argument tells us why it is impossible for this understanding of the "I" to result in a conception of it as "extant" or a representation superadded to and in need of unification with temporality. Finally, it suggests that the dispute between Kant's and Heidegger's philosophical orientations rests not on the question of a lack of understanding of temporality, but on the question of how the ultimate conditions of intelligibility relate to their limits.

1 Heidegger's Critique

One salient entry into this debate is through Heidegger's discussion of the role of the principle of contradiction in Kant's critical philosophy.¹¹ For Kant, this absolutely necessary formal principle is the *conditio sine qua non* of thought, demanding that all thought be in self-agreement. As a purely formal principle, Kant thinks that it cannot restrict itself to temporal conditions: "[a]s a merely logical principle, [it] must not limit its claims to temporal relations" (A152-53/B191-192). It thus cannot be stated in the following way: "*p* and *not p* cannot be asserted *at the same time*." Doing so, the principle of contradiction would refer itself to what occurs in time, and then, temporal events would be a measure of the logical coherence of an assertion. This would be a

⁹ Readings of the first sort would include Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 102–3; and Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, 213. Representing the latter sort would be Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Deduction*, 404–5. Both approaches seem to deflate the timelessness (or what I will call the "atemporality") of the "I." My approach avoids both deflation and noumenal metaphysics, for reasons that will become clear later.

¹⁰ Weatherston's *Heidegger's Interpretation of Kant* does a nice job of pointing out ways in which Heidegger's various criticisms of Kant are dubious. For example, I agree that Heidegger unjustifiably assumes that the "constant presence" of apperception inside what is thought implies that, in itself, apperception has the temporal orientation of "constant presence" (*ibid.*, 150). Here, I still hope to go beyond this in showing why the self-consciousness of reason is a conscious rejection of temporal restriction, and hence to reconstruct in detail Kant's positive reasons for opposing the kind of interpretation Heidegger gives.

¹¹ Heidegger's primary target of analysis is Kant's theoretical philosophy, although he occasionally discusses the "I" of practical reason, e.g., in the lecture courses *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* and *The Essence of Human Freedom*.

mistake, since the principle of contradiction holds sway over the whole of time. Governing all that is possible in time, it cannot be limited by time.¹²

Heidegger recognizes the conditional soundness of this point. So long as “limited by time” means “limited within time,” Kant is correct.¹³ But the representation of time in terms of what happens in its sequential passage is “nonoriginal.” Even for Kant, as we’ll see, the empirical passage of time is enabled by an original (non-empirical) representation of the whole of time. Given this, to say that the ultimate constitutive principle of thought is not conditioned by occurrences within time is not straightaway the same as saying that the principle is not temporal. Time is of course *temporal* even if not *in time*. But Heidegger also sees this as Kant’s reason for asserting the timelessness of the “I.” For one thing, the principle of contradiction is one of logical self-consciousness and therefore of the logical “I.” The general logical criterion of truth is “the agreement of a cognition with the general and formal laws of understanding and reason” (A59/B84). Since pure general logic is only about the form of thinking, abstracting from any object, it concerns “only the formal conditions of agreement with the understanding” (A61/B86). This is to say that the highest logical principle concerns the way in which a thought or judgment (an exercise of understanding) agrees with its own capacity (the understanding). A contradictory judgment would be nothing at all (B190), since it would be a disagreement between the understanding and itself, a self-canceling act. The *sine qua non* of any thought is therefore that any act of consciousness should agree with itself, viz., be a unity of self-consciousness. Kant therefore seems to be arguing that it is not only the principle of contradiction that is exempt from conditions of time, but the logical “I” itself. Heidegger affirms this by citing Kant’s claim that “Pure reason, as a merely intelligible faculty, is not subject to the form of time, and hence not subject to the conditions of the temporal sequence” (A551/B579).

This line of reasoning allegedly leaps from empirical (“everyday” or “vulgar”¹⁴) time to timelessness, failing to consider that the pure time (temporality) out of which empirical time is generated may itself be what conditions the pure “I” and its constitutive principle of contradiction. In this way, Kant shrinks back from temporality and places the “I” outside its purview altogether. In doing so, however, he is also accused of unwittingly falling back into a dogmatic theory of time for the “I.” His way of spelling out the “I” as exempt from temporal conditions is to assert its character as permanent and stable across all representations. As Heidegger observes, Kant characterizes the “I” and pure time itself in similar terms, i.e., as “fixed and perduring.”¹⁵ In Heidegger’s view, this is simply an attempt to show that “neither the ‘I’ nor time is ‘in time’.”¹⁶ The “I” is that which is one and the same inside every cognition. It is therefore not subject to the “temporal sequence.” This causes Heidegger to read Kant as asserting the constant presence of the “I,” which is now itself a distinctively temporal characterization, albeit one that has capitulated to the dogmatic assumption that a particular modality of time (time as constant presence) is the horizon of the meaning of being. Among other problems, this would conflict with Heidegger’s larger point that being as “presence” is only one “temporalization” of time, and thus cannot be the temporality serving as the horizon of intelligibility.¹⁷

Heidegger’s similar criticism in *Being and Time* makes the point in connection with his critique of Cartesianism: “At first, it appears as if Kant has abandoned the Cartesian position of a pre-discovered isolated subject. But that is only illusion.”¹⁸ It is only “at first” that we think Kant abandoned Descartes because, despite Kant’s rejection of the possibility of cognizing the “I” as an object, what he seeks to prove about the “I” is that its logical character mirrors that of substance. Kant had proven in the Analogies of Experience and applied in the Refutation of Idealism the principle “that beings that are changing and beings that are permanent are necessarily present together.”¹⁹ If we then represent the “I” as the “standing and lasting” logical subject serving as the “correlate of all of our representations” (A123), then it is tempting to conclude that this “I” is the

¹² Kant repeatedly says the same of pure reason. Cf. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A539/B567, A556/B584.

¹³ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 136.

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 422.

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 135.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 423–4, 426–7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

permanently present something underlying an everchanging flux of representations, as a substance underlies its properties.

In Heidegger's criticism, it is an "illusion" that Kant abandons Descartes because he holds on to the fundamental characterization of the "I" as substance, even if in a merely logical sense. It may be granted that Kant succeeds in showing that the "I" is only the logical consciousness of binding representations, and further in showing that this licenses no claims about its real substantiality. This still leaves untouched the idea of the "I" as an isolated thinking subject – i.e., as that logical center around which all representations coalesce into a unity of cognition.²⁰ As such, its distinction from cognized substance is really nothing more than a distinction between a merely ontic representation of substance (the explicitly Cartesian view) and an ontological representation of substance (according to which this "I" has the same basic character as substance, even if not in a *material* sense).²¹

It is in this way that the notion of the "I" as subject carries with it a certain temporal interpretation. As a self-conscious unity which is "always already" underlying our cognition, Kant appears to be positing the subject "as something always already objectively present".²² The move Heidegger makes from "the 'I think' always already underlies" to "the 'I think' is always already objectively present" occurs as a result of interpreting "always already underlies" in terms of a constantly accompanying reality.²³ This would appear to commit Kant to holding on to a metaphysically traditional conception of time, since the ultimate condition of intelligibility would be understood in terms of the constantly present dimension of time.²⁴ He concludes: "As a consequence ... the decisive *connection* between *time* and the *I think*" remained shrouded in complete obscurity. It did not even become a problem".²⁵ Characterizing the "I" as a subject or logical substance serves to indicate "the sameness and constancy of something always already objectively present" (*Being and Time*, 320). It does so apparently because of Kant's insistence that the "I" has the same basic character as any other representation of substance – i.e., of that which permanently underlies.

By contrast, for Heidegger:

"I" means the being that is concerned *about* the being of the being which it is ... Existentially, selfhood is only to be found in the authentic potentiality-of-being-a-self, that is, in the authenticity of the being of Dasein *as care*.²⁶

The existential "I" is oriented to phenomena not as the constantly present subject behind my thoughts, but as a concerned openness to an indefinite set of possibilities into which it can press itself forward (and, correspondingly, in terms of the "guilt" which it inherits from itself by having chosen possibilities, etc.). In one discussion of Kant, Heidegger flatly declares their difference in precisely these terms, arguing that "*In the unity of resolve to a possibility, along with a commitment to the past, the self must be able to understand itself in each concrete moment as the same futural self which has already been*" and "It is this transposition of the self into itself as stretched in all dimensions of temporality which constitutes the genuine existential concept".²⁷

This existential conception avoids thinking of the "I" as identical to any particular temporal dimension. It instead affirms the self as a "temporalizing"²⁸ act of generating, unifying, and giving meaning to distinct temporal modalities. This explains why Heidegger believes that Kant never confronts the "meaning" of the being of "I" or its relation to time (the way in which this "I" manifests in its real significance for human beings). The complaint is that Kant ceases analyzing the "I" right at the point where he recognizes it as the constant accompaniment of representations, and thereby does not extend our understanding of it past the traditional

²⁰ I take the illustrative term "coalesce" from Melnick, *Kant's Theory of the Self*, 5. His own usage, however, is *not* intended to indicate that the "I" around which representations coalesce is an isolated thinking subject.

²¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 319–20.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Cf. Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 147–8.

²⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 24.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 322.

²⁷ Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 268.

²⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 329.

bounds of substance, and hence past the idea of constant presence. This “I” which stands next to no other representation²⁹ is understood as the subject’s mere consciousness always already underlying my representations.³⁰ Saying anything further about what this “I” is appears to be ruled out for this very reason. Any attempt to do so would be as useless as chasing one’s tail: to attempt to determine anything about the “I” as an object would already presuppose the very “I” whose nature is under scrutiny.³¹ Because his analysis stops short, there is not only a failure to advance an understanding of selfhood beyond Descartes’s analysis of the “I” as an absolute subject, but also a reticence to admit that apperception itself is nothing but a temporalizing activity, and hence essentially temporal.³²

But we still need to understand how Heidegger deals with Kant’s insistence on the timelessness of the “I,” i.e., even if it is true that he unwittingly shrinks back to a metaphysics of constant presence. *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* argues that Kant conflates the lack of within-time-ness with absolute timelessness. And, as we have seen, Heidegger believes that Kant’s argument for the timelessness of the principle of contradiction is sound only insofar as he meant to reject its restriction by particular times. In Heidegger’s view, within-time-ness characterizes the way in which entities can show up for us in the course of time, and this is but one “essential possibility of the temporalization of temporality.”^{33,34} The more fundamental possibility (original temporality) is constitutive of the very being of Dasein, and hence definitive of the horizon of the possibilities of being for Dasein.³⁵ Anything true of entities within the world must be conditioned by what constitutes the being of the world as such. For Heidegger and Kant, these will be conditions of our being.³⁶

But Heidegger holds that a further leap to the claim that such a constitutive principle is not temporal would be unjustified, since temporality properly understood is not confined to within-time-ness.³⁷ As he goes on to say:

With his orientation toward the nonoriginal essence of time, Kant must deny the temporal character of the “Principle of Contradiction,” for it is illogical to want essentially to determine what time itself is originally with the help of a product derived from it. Precisely because in its innermost essence the self is originally time itself, the I cannot be grasped as “temporal,” i.e., as within time. Pure sensibility (time) and pure reason are not just of the same type; rather they belong together in the unity of the same essence, which makes possible the finitude of human subjectivity in its wholeness.³⁸

Allegedly, Kant rejects the temporality of the “I” only because he is operating with an impoverished conception, i.e., one where time is equated with within-time-ness.³⁹ If Kant had directly thematized time in its “original essence,” as the temporalizing activity which generates and unifies the temporal modalities from

²⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B132.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, B404.

³¹ *Ibid.*, A346/B404.

³² But the failure to question the being of the “I” is not the total failure of Kant’s project. If Kant had followed it through more carefully, he would have been led to exactly what Heidegger himself reveals in *Being and Time*. Kant’s project of laying the transcendental foundations for metaphysics should really lead us to an “abyss” [*Abgrund*] (Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 151). See also Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 118. In the lecture course on Kant, Heidegger is also clear that “every genuine philosophy must constantly move” on the edges of such an abyss (Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 190). Heidegger explains that “Kant himself knew” that the schematism of the understanding unveiled an abyss when he wrote that “This schematism of our understanding with regard to appearances and their mere form is a hidden art in the depths of the human soul, whose true operations we can divine from nature and lay unveiled before our eyes only with difficulty” (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 23–4).

³³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 235.

³⁴ This is “the time “in which” objectively present things come into being and pass away” (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 333).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ For Heidegger, “existential” conditions; for Kant, “rational” conditions.

³⁷ For another recent commentary on this aspect of Heidegger’s criticism of Kant, refer to Lambeth, *Heidegger’s Interpretation of Kant*, 151. Lambeth emphasizes Heidegger’s concern that an a-temporal “I” would make it impossible to explain how concepts and intuitions could be combined. My argument offers a different route for understanding Heidegger’s central concern.

³⁸ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 136.

³⁹ Cf., Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 77. Cf. also Sherover, *Heidegger, Kant and Time*, 208.

out of itself, then he would also have understood that this temporalizing activity just is the activity of authentic self- or I-hood. This is why Heidegger argues in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* that Kant was on the verge of discovering pure apperception to be identical to this original temporalizing, and hence, that the “I” just is original time.^{40,41} Ultimately, that Kant shrinks back from this speaks to his unpreparedness for accepting time as the horizon of meaning for all comportment towards beings.⁴² Since the timeless “I” which does supply the ultimate ground of all unity rejects temporal conditions, Kant appears to place the “I” *alongside* temporality as something constantly “there,” affecting time, but not essentially unified with it.⁴³ Since this merely present-at-hand subject is in one sense timeless and yet permanently “there,” Kant’s acceptance of the “I” as the ultimate condition of experience is tantamount to the acceptance of the “I” as constant presence.

2 Kant’s Temporal Difference

Despite Heidegger’s argument, I want to suggest that Kant is at pains to distinguish the timelessness of the mere lack of temporal determination (pure time’s lack of within-time-ness) from that of the self-consciousness of the lack of any temporal conditions (a-temporality). This dual conception of timelessness will reveal what is missing in Heidegger’s Kant – namely, a rational ground for opposing time as the ultimate horizon of intelligibility.

Because Kant contraposes the timeless “I” to the succession of empirical times, Heidegger criticizes him for thinking of time primarily as a continuous series of present moments. Indeed, Kant presents it in terms of the contrast between simultaneity and succession. The *a priori* necessary representation of time “has only one dimension: different times are not simultaneous, but successive (just as different spaces are not successive, but simultaneous)” (A31/B47). This successiveness, however, is not that of things in themselves, but rather of my inner states through an act of “self-intuiting” (B69). While the familiar notion of “self-affection” in Kant involves the understanding’s effect upon sensibility, Heidegger seems to think of it more broadly, beginning with how Kant conceives of inner sense (time) as the means by which “the mind intuits itself, or its inner state” (A22/B37). This self-intuiting is not originally thematized by Kant as an effect of understanding (though it is later revealed that only an act of understanding can make the “formal intuitions” of space and time possible).⁴⁴ Abstracting from the effect of the understanding, inner sense itself has the form of sensibly noticing the passage of my own states. Time here is nothing other than the subject’s immediate consciousness of itself, as Arthur Melnick has put it, as the shifting of attention of my own passing states.⁴⁵

This “Critical” re-orienting of the notion of time rejects the notion of time as “something that would subsist for itself or attach to things as an objective determination” (A32/B49). It does not subsist for itself (as a thing in itself) because it can be “nothing other than the form of inner sense, i.e., of the intuition of our self and our inner state” (A33/B49). This has a couple of important implications, one of which is that time is a consciousness of the elapsing of states. It is therefore not simply the occurrence of different states in succession, but an awareness *of* succession.⁴⁶ The second implication is that time is the form of inner sense,

⁴⁰ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 134.

⁴¹ Cf. Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 111.

⁴² Kant was concerned primarily with the possibility of “cognition” (*Erkenntnis*), with which Heidegger also takes issue (e.g., *Being and Time* §44). More on this in the conclusion.

⁴³ See also Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 197. It is also worth noting the similarity with Hegel’s early criticism of Kant as a philosopher of absolute opposition, and his recommendation to take the productive imagination as the original faculty from which the “I” and the not-“I” spring (Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 73).

⁴⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B161n.

⁴⁵ Melnick, *Kant’s Theory of the Self*, 17–8.

⁴⁶ This is perhaps what marks the difference between human and merely animal time. For the animal, time is nothing but difference of moments, whereas for the human being it is a consciousness of this difference. It is therefore a kind of self-consciousness. Melnick describes Kant’s notion of time in terms of marking or counting in a progressive shifting of attention, which can help to bring out the phenomenological character of this temporality (Melnick, *Kant’s Theory of the Self*, 23).

or “merely a subjective condition of our (human) intuition” (A35/B51) and “the constant form of my inner intuition” (B163). So, time is originally pure; it is not a stretch of moments or a piece of sensible content, but a form of being conscious of such content. Because this form is nothing but the subject’s self-intuition, it is thereby nothing outside the subject, “extant,” or otherwise “present at hand.” Indeed, it precedes any such representation, as anything present to me must also occur in time.⁴⁷ While in this way time cannot be made intelligible as an appearance (it is never perceived),⁴⁸ it is commonly represented spatially in the form of a line “progressing to infinity, in which the manifold constitutes a series that is of only one dimension” (A34/B50).⁴⁹ But here already, time as the mere form of inner intuiting’s successiveness is revealed as itself nothing successive at all. While all determinations of time are determinations of the elapsing of my inner states, “time itself does not elapse, but the existence of that which is changeable elapses in it” (A144/B183). Thus, there is a distinction between what occurs within the order of succession (what is “within-time” for Heidegger) and the non-elapsing form of consciousness of succession. Occurrences are successively structured, but time does not “occur” as such. We may call this distinction the *temporal difference* – i.e., the difference between what occurs within temporal succession and the pure or original time in which it occurs.

The temporal difference can be likened to what Heidegger later calls the “ontological difference,” or the distinction between beings and their mode of being.⁵⁰ For Kant, the temporal difference can be seen as a close relative, as it marks the boundary between times and the temporal consciousness which enables these times to exist as its divisions. One consequence of the temporal difference is that the form of time itself lacks the successive character of moments in time; the form of time is permanent and changeless, moments of time fleeting. Time itself therefore “endures while everything else changes”.⁵¹ This changelessness of time for Kant is sometimes represented by Heidegger as the merely negative presupposition in a transcendental argument: time is primarily the continuous “now” series, while these “nows” presuppose a non-elapsing representational ground. But this permanent or non-elapsing pure time also has positive functions for Kant. For one thing, it grounds the representation of the permanent in phenomena (substance).⁵² It is also the *source* of the divisions which make up the temporal sequences of empirical time, since Kant conceives of pure time as an intuited whole that is prior to its parts. But the conscious representation of pure time also now appears to be timeless in a certain sense. Since it is that which underlies the possibility of any determinately temporal occurrences, it is that which cannot occur and therefore has no temporal “place.” The timelessness of the mere lack of temporal place or determination is the timelessness of time itself. It is, as Heidegger puts it, no more than saying that time is not in time.⁵³

⁴⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A34/B50.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, B257.

⁴⁹ This “one-dimensionality” of time may suggest that Heidegger is right to claim that for Kant, time is nothing but a continuous series of “nows” (Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 140). For a challenge to this view, see Melnick, *Kant’s Theory of the Self*, 107–8. It may be possible to criticize Heidegger’s claim by examining the same B50 passage in full: “And just because this inner intuition yields no shape we also attempt to remedy this lack through analogies, and represent the temporal sequence through a line progressing to infinity, in which the manifold constitutes a series that is of only one dimension, and infer from the properties of this line to all the properties of time, with the sole difference that the parts of the former are simultaneous but those of the latter always exist successively. From this it is also apparent that the representation of time is itself an intuition, since all its relations can be expressed in an outer intuition.” When Kant says that “we attempt to remedy this lack,” he means that we replace the immediate intuition of inner sense with a proxy spatial intuition in order to present to ourselves the image of time. It is this “image” which is much closer to a continuous series of “nows.” While I cannot argue for the claim here, it is conceivable that the idea of a continuous series of ‘nows’ (Heidegger’s charge) implies more than what Kant means to suggest when he says that time is unidimensional. Kant’s point, as clarified for instance at A31/B47, is that time is only successive and never simultaneous. This may not necessarily suggest that it is not ‘ecstatic’ in the sense of being, as Melnick puts it, an ongoing “flow of progressive attention (temporizing)” (Melnick, *Kant’s Theory of the Self*, 108).

⁵⁰ Kant’s transcendental philosophy exhibits the ontological difference in several ways. Not only is particular temporal content distinguished from the original form of time, but any particular being is distinguished from the forms of particular beings, the categories.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A144/B183.

⁵³ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 134.

Heidegger himself acknowledges and even admires Kant's account of the form of time as the self-activity from which temporal determinations arise, and which is itself a kind of "nothing."⁵⁴ Pure or original time is nothing in the sense that it "is in itself not an object, but the merely formal condition of one" (A291/B347).⁵⁵ It is the status of time as nothing which enables us to see the difference between the self-activity of "temporalizing" and the times that are so determined. Since the temporal difference is a point of concurrence between the two thinkers, we must understand the critique of Kant as resting, not on the claim that Kant only represented time as within-timeness, but on the claim that he reverted to such an account of time *despite* having at his disposal the grounds for conceiving time as original temporality. But this criticism nevertheless does not carefully consider Kant's positive reasons for rejecting even original temporality as the ultimate condition of cognition.

2.1 From the Temporal Difference to Timelessness

Heidegger's reading of Kant's account of the "threefold synthesis" as an account of the three modes of temporal syntheses provides us a starting point for seeing how Kant rejects the temporality of the "I." While the synthesis of apprehension first "runs through" and "takes together" a manifold of intuitions, the synthesis of reproduction brings them together by associating one with another which follows or accompanies it, thereby distinguishing one representation from its antecedent. This already marks a difference between merely encountering a manifold of temporal difference (e.g., one representation, then another, etc.) and the representation of one as following another. It is then the synthesis of reproduction which first represents a sequence as such. However, Kant argues that without representing a sequence as following a rule of necessary connection, no such synthesis could take place at all. To reproduce one representation in accordance with another requires that the sequence be more than mere difference ("If cinnabar were now red, now black, now light, now heavy ... then my empirical imagination would never even get the opportunity to think of heavy cinnabar on the occasion of the representation of the color red" (A101)). Still, something further grounds the necessity of such a rule:

Without consciousness that that which we think is the very same as what we thought a moment before, all reproduction in the series of representations would be in vain. For it would be a new representation in our current state, which would not belong at all to the act through which it had been gradually generated, and its manifold would never constitute a whole, since it would lack the unity that only consciousness can obtain for it. (A103)

There must be a unity of consciousness under which any application of a rule of synthesis is brought; otherwise, no relation between representations would be a consciousness of how the represented manifold belongs to a single act of representing; the relation that is "gradually generated" would never constitute a unity of consciousness and hence there would be no cognition at all. While even the name "synthesis of reproduction" hints that it concerns consciousness of the past, Heidegger insightfully points out that this mode of temporalizing in relation to the past presupposes a future-oriented consciousness. When Kant tells us that the ground of necessity for all synthesis is a certain unity of consciousness, Heidegger interprets this as meaning that the ground of the necessity for any synthesis is a consciousness of myself as a "being-able-to-hold-something-before-us [*Vorhaltbarkeit*]"⁵⁶ As a consciousness of what can be brought to cognition in general, the synthesis of recognition belonging to the "I" seems to be nothing other than cognition's open anticipation of what can possibly be cognized in accordance with the other two modes of synthesis. As such, this "anticipatory" (futural) mode of synthesis prefigures and unifies the other two. As Heidegger says later regarding his

⁵⁴ For example, Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 51, 101. In the latter passage, Heidegger notes that the *ens imaginarium* (space or time as form of intuition) is "nothing" in the sense of "what is not a being" or what is not actual. This is clearly a point which Heidegger takes to be an anticipation of original temporality's way of exhibiting the temporal difference, as Heidegger himself relies on this feature of original temporality to distinguish it from everyday or vulgar time (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 365–6, 420).

⁵⁵ Cf. also Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A176/B219, A183/B226, A192/B237, A211/B257.

⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 130.

own account of temporality, “the primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future”.⁵⁷

The shift from apprehension to recognition is here conceived as a temporal transition from mere difference of “nows” to the representation of a sequence within a single consciousness of what is cognizable. This latter form of consciousness, conceived as future-directed or anticipatory synthesis, determines the character of the whole of time.⁵⁸ The latter is perhaps most apparent in the Analogies of Experience, where Kant argues that experience is possible only by determining a temporal sequence of events with regard to time as a whole:

Understanding belongs to all experience and its possibility, and the first thing that it does for this is not to make the representation of the objects distinct, but rather to make the representation of an object possible at all. Now this happens through its conferring temporal order on the appearances and their existence by assigning to each of these, as a consequence, a place in time determined *a priori* in regard to the preceding appearances, without which it would not agree with time itself, which determines the position of all its parts *a priori*. (A199-200/B244-245)

As empirical cognition,⁵⁹ all experience involves acts of the faculty of cognition, the understanding. Among these acts is that of determining the necessary temporal order of experience. Now, for there to be cognition of a necessary temporal ordering, there must be cognition that this ordering is fixed in relation to others. To perceive that the ship must first be upstream before it is downstream is to cognize it from a rule of temporal succession.⁶⁰ In order for this succession to have a systematic connection to the other elements of my cognition, the necessity in the relation presupposes a systematic nexus of relations of temporal necessity. The understanding confers “temporal order on the appearances and their existence by assigning to each of these, as a consequence, a place in time determined *a priori* in regard to the preceding appearances, without which it would not agree with time itself, which determines the position of all its parts *a priori*” (A199-200/B245). To assign and confer temporal order on appearances, then, requires that I conceive of the order of this particular temporal manifold as fixed in relation to all others, and then as in agreement with the representation of time as a whole. This requires an *a priori* cognition of the whole of time (a cognition with universality and necessity) because I could never gain cognition of its wholeness or unity through the empirical cognition of any number of discrete temporal parts. As Heidegger would say, the understanding “always already” has a grasp on time as a whole, prior to empirical intuition.⁶¹

Hence, determinate temporal sequences do not aggregate to form the representation of time. Any distinction between temporal parts is instead drawn within a prior whole. This is precisely what leads Kant to characterize time as pure, not empirical, intuition. An empirical intuition cannot take place except against the background of an immediate and singular conscious representation of the whole within which distinct spaces and times are first delimited. But it is also no concept. A concept is a general representation (a “universal”) common to and contained in many. By contrast, intuition is a singular representation containing a manifold, or at least containing the possibility of infinite division. Space and time are therefore original unities containing an infinite possible manifold of spatial and temporal parts, or what Kant calls “infinite given magnitudes” (A25/B39, A32/B47). We can now see why Heidegger recognizes Kant as the first and only one who began to traverse the path toward an understanding of temporality. For Heidegger, “temporality” designates not the ordinary philosophical concept of time, but a grasp of time’s fundamental mode of being. Kant started us on the path to understanding temporality by distinguishing between empirical times and the pure, non-elapsed representation of time.

⁵⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 329.

⁵⁸ Hence, if Heidegger is right that the “future” is primary among the modes of temporal syntheses for Kant, then he and Kant would agree that the future (in its ordinary temporal mode, not in its everyday or vulgar sense) is dominant in determining Dasein as a whole.

⁵⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B147.

⁶⁰ Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A192/B237.

⁶¹ Heidegger’s phrase “always already” [*immer schon*] is intended as an explicitly temporal rendering of the *a priori*, indicating that “at all times” something is there “in advance.”

The temporal difference prepares us for one sense of “timelessness.” For Kant, the pure intuition of time lacks temporal determinations, because it is that through which temporal determinacy becomes possible. As we saw, time is a “nothing,” an *ens imaginarium* or the “empty intuition without an object”:

The mere form of intuition, without substance, is in itself not an object, but the merely formal condition of one (as appearance), like pure space and pure time, which are to be sure something, as the forms for intuiting, but are not in themselves objects that are intuited (*ens imaginarium*). (A291/B347)

In a much-neglected passage, Heidegger acknowledges this, saying that the *ens imaginarium* “is not a being in the sense of what is at hand. Pure space and pure time are “Something,” but certainly not “objects” “[...] Space is nothing actual, i.e., it is not a being accessible in perception”.⁶² Moreover, since pure time is itself nothing actual, but instead the pure self-affection which produces the actual, it is like the darkness out of which the light of being emerges. In a *Reflexion* from 1776 to 1778, Kant writes that “reality is the first *logice*, and from this, it is inferred that it is also *metaphysice* and *objective* the first and the gloom out of which the light of experience elaborates shapes. Thus, appearances are originally manifold, and unity arises if one abstracts from the manifold”.⁶³ While reality logically precedes negation (since negating requires something to first be given), “nothing” *ontologically* precedes “something” (since from the point of view of sensibility, all light of being first emerges out of the originally indeterminate and the manifold).⁶⁴ The darkness of this pure self-affecting activity (also conceived by Heidegger as the dark “root” of both stems of cognition⁶⁵) is darkness because it is prior to any particular temporal content, and hence prior to cognition of an object.⁶⁶ Even though Kant officially recognizes the “darkness” of pure time, he allegedly does not appreciate this darkness as the groundless “abyss” from which all intelligibility first emerges.⁶⁷

2.2 From Timelessness to Atemporality

So far, the timelessness of the “I” has been understood straightforwardly as the lack of within-time-ness. But Kant goes further than this in holding that the “I” is genuinely a-temporal, being neither inside of time nor identical to inner sense, and therefore outside of time. In the discussion about the relation between understanding and sensibility in the “B” Deduction, he not only brings to our attention the puzzle of identifying the transcendental with the empirical “I,” but he elaborates on how the faculty of sensibility is first given determination by the faculty of understanding. It is as part of this discussion that a famous footnote emerges in which Kant clarifies that the “formal intuitions” of space and time are first given only thanks to an effect of the understanding:

Space, represented as **object** (as is really required in geometry), contains more than the mere form of intuition, namely the **comprehension** of the manifold given in accordance with the form of sensibility in an **intuitive** representation, so that the **form of intuition** merely gives the manifold, but the **formal intuition** gives unity of the representation. In the Aesthetic I ascribed this unity merely to sensibility, only in order to note that it precedes all concepts, though to be sure it presupposes a synthesis, which does not belong to the senses but through which all concepts of space and time first become possible. For since through it (as the understanding determines the sensibility) space or time are first **given** as intuitions, the unity of this *a priori* intuition belongs to space and time, and not to the concept of the understanding. (B160-161n)

⁶² Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 101.

⁶³ Kant, *Notes of Fragments*, AA 18:139.

⁶⁴ I am indebted to Longuenesse’s insightful discussion of this point in *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, 308–9.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 97ff.

⁶⁶ For this reason, I disagree with Golob when he argues that Heidegger’s Kant rests experience on the horizon of the pure image as “a piece of spatial or temporal content” (“Heidegger on Kant,” 362). By contrast, Heidegger reads Kant as holding that pure time itself is a horizon of cognition which is no content at all, because it is empty.

⁶⁷ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 151.

For space to be cognizable, as opposed to merely being a way in which intuitions are given to the senses, it must exhibit the unity of an act of synthesis that does not belong to the senses (and hence belongs to the spontaneity of understanding). Indeed, for Kant, all combination is an act of the understanding, and as such there is no synthesis in sensibility alone.⁶⁸ This does not mean that synthesis in general presupposes particular conceptual determinations. As Kant says in this passage, in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* he ascribed the unity of intuition to sensibility in order to indicate that it precedes all concepts. Nevertheless, this unity presupposes a synthesis of understanding. Hence, there is a general synthesis of the pure manifold of intuition even prior to the application of a particular concept.⁶⁹ Far from reducing the pure intuition of time to a concept, then, Kant says that it is this act of understanding upon sensibility which first lets time be given *as* an intuition. Inner sense, on its own, “contains the mere **form** of intuition, but without the combination of the manifold in it, and thus it does not yet contain any **determinate** intuition at all” (B154). When inner sense is determined by the synthetic act of the “I,” not only is its intuition made determinate, but “we also always perceive this in ourselves” (*ibid.*). Kant’s examples here are geometrical: we cannot think of a line without drawing it, or a circle without describing it. But this inner perception of the line and the circle are determinate appearances (phenomena) corresponding to the determining act of thinking (the spontaneity of the understanding). Indeed, “we cannot even represent time without, in **drawing** a straight line ..., attending merely to the action of the synthesis of the manifold through which we successively determine the inner sense” (*ibid.*). This act of synthesis through which a manifold is made determinate is, therefore, not part of the determinate series. The act of the subject – what Kant calls “motion” of the subject – “first produces the concept of succession at all” (B155). So, “motion” [*Bewegung*] here is sharply distinguished from motion of an object in space, since the latter is cognized through experience, while the former is “pure act” (B155n).⁷⁰

Because in this act we cognize this pure intuition *as* time (as a whole sphere), we are capable of recognizing objects in the flow of time as having their place within its whole sphere (just as with space, with respect to which geometry is possible only because it can cognize necessary spatial relationships within the whole of space). For Heidegger, likewise, the *Bewegung* of Dasein “is not the motion of something objectively present. It is determined from the stretching along [*Erstrecktheit*] of Dasein,” the constitution of the human being which is prior to any objectively present “stretch of life” or determinate temporal moments (*Being and Time*, 374–5). The pure act here is a “stretching along,” but it is Dasein’s temporal extension of itself. In this way, it is not static and fixed, but ek-static or going outside itself in order to generate the conditions under which determinate temporal moments can be grasped.

But if this pure act is not only the origin of determinate temporal stretches but also the horizon against which all intelligibility first emerges, we must ask how this act serves as an ultimate condition or limit of human experience. The realm of appearances that always accompanies the determining act of the “I” is the realm of successive occurrence. Attending merely to the successive character of appearances, it is easy to see that our appearing and disappearing representations occur against the background of a kind of temporal horizon. Within time, what appears is always disappearing in expectation of what comes next, and carries with it some consciousness of what came before. I can follow this series continually, anticipating ever further temporal conditions. But I will never, from this perspective, have cognition of the whole time within which the series is constituted *as* a series. The horizon of temporal possibility surrounds me, but only as a limit which when approached recedes further into the distance.

Heidegger does conceive of the limits of all intelligibility as “horizontal.” He does not conceive of this horizon as the horizon that we merely glimpse *within time*, because he recognizes that our horizon is always glimpsed from Dasein’s perspective of being the source of its “self-stretching.” Nevertheless, original

⁶⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B129–30, B154–5.

⁶⁹ This has also been argued for, in different ways, by Longuenesse in *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*; and Williams, “Kant on the Original Synthesis.”

⁷⁰ In this sense, “motion” as pure act may be more accurately described in terms of the Aristotelian distinction between *energeia* (act, actuality) and *kinesis* (process). Motion as *energeia* is not made up of temporal parts, nor does it serve as a temporal part in anything else; it does not become a unified act only after traversing a temporal series, but originally constitutes the possibility of a certain temporal series. For more on this in relation to Kant and Heidegger, refer to Ellis, “Freedom for Losing Oneself.”

temporality is a unity of the three *factical* horizons of time (*Being and Time*, 310). As he puts it later, there is a strangeness in the very fact of intelligibility, which is fundamentally inexplicable in further rational terms.⁷¹ In a very deep sense, Kant and Heidegger agree that temporality itself (considered apart from an act of reason or understanding) is horizontal in just this way: temporality is, from within, intelligible only up to the point of its limits.

Consider a pair of remarks from the *Critique's* Doctrine of Method:

If I represent the surface of the earth (in accordance with sensible appearance) as a plate, I cannot know how far it extends. But experience teaches me this: that wherever I go, I always see a space around me in which I could proceed farther; thus I cognize the limits of my actual knowledge of the earth at any time, but not the boundaries of all possible description of the earth. But if I have gotten as far as knowing that the earth is a sphere and its surface the surface of a sphere, then from a small part of the latter, e.g., from the magnitude of one degree, I can cognize its diameter and, by means of this, the complete boundary [...] (A759/B787)

Our reason is not like an indeterminably extended plane, the limits of which one can cognize only in general, but must rather be compared with a sphere, the radius of which can be found out from the curvature of an arc on its surface (from the nature of synthetic *a priori* propositions), from which its content and its boundary can also be ascertained with certainty. (A762/B790)

If I take the appearance of the earth merely from the way my senses are instructed, then I would represent it as an indefinite plane that appears to extend at least as far as its horizon. Approaching this limit, it seems that I can always proceed further, with nothing indicating a determinate endpoint. I therefore have a “general” idea of this limit, though because it is one which necessarily evades my grasp by providing the frame within which anything is graspable, it is not something I cognize determinately. Now Kant tells us that, contra sensibility, reason knows its determinate bounds. The “critical” position seems to eliminate the possibility that reason has its limits “horizontally.”

A horizon for reason would be an ultimate “factual” or brute condition of reason’s principles, determinacy, and hence of the cognizability of anything through it.⁷² It is commonly thought that Kant’s critical system rests on such grounds, for example, because Kant admits that there are no further reasons to be given as to why the table of the forms of judgment is composed as it is, or why our forms of sensibility are space and time. But, in the above Kant appears to deny rational facticity. If reason cognizes its own boundaries then it thereby cognizes its own form completely. The formal “limits” of reason could not be limits that recede into the distance as they are approached – i.e., limits which are known “only in general,” framing an indefinitely traversable space. Limits of this sort could only be noticed, like a mere negation or absence, but not known like the boundary that encloses a whole sphere. Kant illustrates this difference in the *Prolegomena* by defining limits (*Schranken*) as mere negations that affect us and indicate the impossibility of completeness, while boundaries (*Grenzen*) presuppose “a space that is found outside a certain fixed location”.⁷³ To cognize a boundary is to determine that there is “space” on the other side of it. This does not necessitate *cognition*, but at least *thought*, of what is beyond the boundary. In thinking beyond it, the “I” is not contained by it. Insofar as the self-consciousness of reason is a determining activity, it is impossible for it to recognize itself as contained within limits of any kind, for all recognition requires not merely noticing an inability (a mere negation, which can be felt by any creature with consciousness) but getting into view or grasping the limit *as* something given to my consciousness. In the latter case, if we could cognize this with determinacy, we would face the strange result of having purportedly objective cognition of limits which cannot themselves be criticized. The “I” of reason is a consciousness that cannot be contained, lest we sacrifice cognition’s objectivity.⁷⁴

⁷¹ “Only when the strangeness of beings oppresses us does it arouse and evoke wonder” (Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?,” 109). This is the occasion for the question “why?” See Bruno’s, *Facticity and the Fate of Reason* for further discussion of this topic in Heidegger.

⁷² For a recent discussion of this kind of condition in Kant, refer to Bruno, *Facticity and the Fate of Reason*.

⁷³ Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be Able to Come Forward as a Science*, AA 4:352-353.

⁷⁴ Alexandra Newton similarly points out that “what we cannot think is actively thought, through acts of self-division in thought ... Rather than passively encountering what I cannot think or judge, I actively divide my thoughts from consciousness of doing so, and thus can think what is not” (Newton, “Kant on Negation,” 11).

Kant confirms this again by criticizing Hume for merely limiting, but not drawing determinate boundaries to, our understanding (A767/B795). By acknowledging mere limits on knowledge, Hume “brings about a general distrust but no determinate knowledge of the ignorance that is unavoidable for us” (*ibid.*). Kant’s striking claim here is that critical philosophy rests not on absolute knowledge, but rather on knowledge of our absolute ignorance (of certain matters). Despite Hume’s admirable capacity to doubt the dogmatic conclusions of the rationalists, he could never become conscious of the true ignorance that accompanies finite rational knowers, for this ignorance consists in knowing what can never be known. And absent this, if the understanding “cannot distinguish whether certain questions lie within its horizon or not, then it is never sure of its claims and its possession [...]” (A238/B297).

Now we see that not only does Kant’s explanation of the unity of self-consciousness lack the character of within-time-ness, but it is also the source of all determination, hence the source of objective cognition. And this requires that the “I” be responsible for the determination of time’s character as a whole. If so, then the timelessness of the “I” consists *in* being conscious of its exemption from the restriction of any temporal condition. This is not just to say that the “I” lacks a within-time determination, but also that the limits of the “I” cannot be the limits of time.⁷⁵

At the same time, the “I” would be nothing at all if not for the sensible conditions under which it could act.⁷⁶ Does this not mean that time conditions the “I”? Here we must see that Kant is flexible enough to recognize different types of conditions. For him, sensible conditions are those under which the understanding can first be exercised. But the mere enabling of the understanding’s exercise is not the determining of its act.⁷⁷ On both textual and general philosophical grounds, such an idea would be untenable. First, Kant is quite clear that the limits of sensibility are given by an act of understanding.⁷⁸ For sensibility, abstracted from its conditioning by understanding, these limits are brute, and our relation to them would be as the explorer of the indefinitely flat earth relates to the horizon. In this way, sensibility has the pretension of extending itself to include everything that is. But, as we just saw, this pretension must be curbed for objective knowledge to be possible, and that takes place through an act of understanding. This act of understanding first enables sensibility to deliver us not mere affections, but cognizable intuitions.⁷⁹

Kant also explains that “[s]elf-consciousness in general is therefore the representation of that which is the condition of all unity, and yet is itself unconditioned” (A401). This statement occurs in the Paralogisms, where Kant is concerned to show that apperception’s merely logical or formal representation of itself as a simple and numerically identical substance does not yield *material* self-knowledge. Still, because pure self-consciousness is, as Stephen Engstrom formulates it, “identical with that of which it is a consciousness,”⁸⁰ its understanding of itself as (merely) formally unconditional would yield self-cognition of its formal unconditionality. To be sure, no object of experience is unconditioned,⁸¹ but the pure “I” is neither an experience nor does it take itself to be any kind of material cognition.⁸²

What I have called the temporal difference now seems possible only thanks to the a-temporality of the “I,” since the temporal difference is no *mere* difference, but a determinate distinction drawn between within-time-

⁷⁵ I believe that Golob (“Heidegger on Kant”) is correct when he argues that Kant conceives of the form of cognition as lying beyond any piece of spatial or temporal content, and so beyond any “horizon” that consists of such content. But I disagree with Golob that Heidegger’s Kant asserts such a claim, for reasons articulated above. Unlike Golob, I read Kant as explicitly rejecting the whole idea that the ultimate condition of all cognition is horizontal.

⁷⁶ Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B1.

⁷⁷ Cf. “The senses do not have command over understanding. Rather, they offer themselves to understanding merely in order to be at its disposal” (Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, AA 7:145), and “[...] a sovereign without a people (like understanding without sensibility) is not able to do anything at all” (Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, AA 7:196). From this, we can see that when Kant says that our cognition is “restricted” to appearances, he does not mean that something outside the power of reason sets limits to it.

⁷⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B310–1.

⁷⁹ Again, cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B161n.

⁸⁰ Engstrom, “Knowledge and Its Object,” 36.

⁸¹ Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A326/B383.

⁸² Cf. Kant, Reflexion 5661 in *Notes and Fragments*, AA 18:318.

ness and the unity of time itself. This requires a judgment of the whole of time as that within which necessary temporal order can be determined. Having now a *concept* of the pure intuition of time involves a consciousness that exceeds the boundaries of time, and this is in virtue of the distinction between concepts and intuitions. Being a representation contained in an indefinite manifold, a concept contains in it the consciousness of the possibility of identifying marks in an indefinite number of instances and hence involves a general consciousness or consciousness of universality. The consciousness of such a possibility must be unrestricted, since otherwise, it could not be conscious of its indefinite applicability. This consciousness of unrestricted universality is, for Kant, the universal “I” or self-consciousness in general, since the role of the “I” in all cognition is to be not a concept but rather “the vehicle of all concepts whatever [...]” (A341/B399). Concepts inherit their generality from the absolute and unrestricted universality of the “I.” Even empirical concepts, which are borrowed from experience, can function as such only on the grounds of reflecting the categories and forms of judging which are themselves empty and unrestricted (A181/B224; B166n). It is only in this way that experience can include synthetic *a priori* judgments, i.e., synthetic judgments also containing unrestricted necessity and universality.⁸³

We see that Kant has carefully considered the reasons not only for asserting that the “I” is beyond time, but more specifically for rejecting the idea that the limits of the “I” are horizontal. This places him directly at odds with Heidegger’s account of Dasein’s limits, not because Kant shrinks back from temporality as the root of all cognition, but because he determinately opposes the thought that cognition is ultimately conditioned by a horizontal limit.

Before concluding, it may be worth noting that it is not only in Kant’s theoretical philosophy that we can see this point. In “The End of All Things,” Kant also directly thematizes the idea of thinking beyond time. Here, in discussing the ultimate ends of practical reason, he writes that from a moral point of view, we must represent ourselves (in death) as going “out of time into eternity” (AA 8:327). This is necessary as a means of representing to ourselves a “judgment day” – a final day upon which a determination of our basic moral character [*Gesinnung*] may be rendered.⁸⁴ Apart from the fact that our moral vocation requires the perfection of virtue which cannot take place in time, this timeless self-conception is necessary for representing practical reason’s own temporal difference. Just as theoretical reason must represent the difference between what occurs in the temporal sequence of cognition and the time of which this sequence partakes, practical reason must represent the difference between the “daily” struggle between our predisposition to the good and our propensity to evil (*Religion*, AA 6:42) and the new beginning of virtue at every moment: “Virtue is always *in progress* and yet always starts *from the beginning*.”⁸⁵ And, as we have seen, to represent the temporal difference is to be conscious not only of the difference between “within-time-ness” and the form of time as such, but also of the wholeness of the latter. Especially in the practical register, this is unavoidable if we know that we are bound by a moral law. The moral law is not only temporally unconditioned – like the principle of contradiction – but its adoption reflects a choice which determines the moral character of a whole life.⁸⁶

3 Conclusion: Where the Debate Really Lies

For Heidegger, temporality is the horizontal unity of the ecstasies of time. As horizontal, temporality is a mere limit in Kant’s sense. For Kant, by contrast, time serves as a condition for the possibility of cognition precisely because the sphere of its significance is cognized determinately as a boundary. Heidegger’s critique of Kant rests on the idea that pushing the “I” beyond temporal conditions results in inadvertently pushing it back into

⁸³ Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B4.

⁸⁴ Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxxii. We are never satisfied with the temporal, because reason’s practical need is greater than what any magnitude of time could possibly deliver.

⁸⁵ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, AA 6:409.

⁸⁶ Cf., e.g., the discussion in Kant, *Religion*, AA 6:31, 6:46–7.

the dogmatic temporal interpretation of classical metaphysics. This involves the assumption that anything of significance, even the purely apperceptive “I,” presupposes a temporal horizon of its significance.⁸⁷ As such, Heidegger’s critique overlooks the careful considerations that lead Kant to reject any temporal conditions for the “I.” The “I” cannot have its significance against a background of limits that it does not determinately cognize, without thereby giving up its power to determine what is objectively cognizable.

Kant would now also reject Heidegger’s notion that “freeing” the “I” from time means placing it alongside time, which, as we have seen, would imply that this timeless “I” would simply gain a new temporal interpretation. The idea that the atemporal “I” exists alongside temporality comes from the idea that such an “I” is an element which, because it is beyond time, is superadded to or left over from the transcendental analysis of time.⁸⁸ If my analysis of Kant is correct, then this cannot be true. Heidegger is right that transcendental self-consciousness is an activity immanent to temporality (not a second act in addition to temporal cognition), but for Kant, this would not imply that this self-consciousness is temporal (just as resting on conditions of sensibility does not mean that the understanding is limited by sensibility). By contrast, the transcendental “I” is the conscious form of any possible cognition. As form, it is immanent to all material cognition, but in itself, it is a consciousness of its not being conditioned by temporality; it understands itself as neither restricted by the parameters of time nor as identical with them. This does not pretend to completely resolve the issue that puzzles Heidegger, viz. how it is that the atemporal “I” is connected with the temporal one. But it reveals two things. First, Heidegger has not been sufficiently sensitive to Kant’s actual reasoning – reasoning which is quite plausible when granting the goal of explaining the possibility of objective cognition. Second, it is difficult to accuse Kant of asserting the timeless presence of the “I” in lieu of its original temporality, for if Kant is right that the transcendental “I” sets but is not restricted by its limits, then the active self-conscious unity of this “I” is also formally or logically prior to any determination of the meaning of “eternal.” And even if this “I” were understood as eternal, it is not possible to understand it as originally having the determination of eternal presence, past, or future.⁸⁹

Of course, Heidegger will not simply grant that the ultimate condition of intelligibility is rational or cognitive in the way that Kant means it. The dispute over how to place the “I” in relation to time should now be seen as a dispute not over the form of temporality, or over whether Kant “shrank back” from the true meaning of it, but instead as one about how the ultimate condition of all intelligibility relates to its own limits. Kant did not merely assume that this ultimate condition is rational, nor did he assume that the ultimate condition is a horizon (merely overlooking what a horizonal structure would imply). By contrast, he believes that without this condition being rational, cognition would fail to be objective. And if it is rational, then this condition relates to its limits as boundaries that it determines, not as the limits of a horizon, and therefore not as temporal.

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⁸⁷ Indeed, Heidegger even frames Kant’s categories as having “horizontal-ecstatic reality” (Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 65). His most explicit treatment of Kant also makes the transcendental power of imagination a horizon of all possible objects (Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 97–9).

⁸⁸ Cf. Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 69, where he claims that Kant traces all conditions of truth back to the “I,” then frames the “I” as the subject whose predicates are representations, suggesting that he thinks Kant failed to capture its immanence to experience.

⁸⁹ This will require us to think very hard about what it means for the “activity” of the “I” to have no temporal determination. But this is not a problem unique to this context.

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