From Transcendental Logic to Transcendental Deduction

Let me see if I can say a few things to re-cap our first discussion of the Transcendental Logic, and help you get a foothold for what follows.

Kant begins by trying to locate his project by placing it in a “conceptual space” he thinks his readers will be familiar with already. Most of that we can ignore, as long as we understand that Transcendental Logic will concern how we necessarily conceptualize the “raw data” that we get from sensations. (That what we uncover in this discussion is necessary is the main focus of what is called the “Transcendental Deduction.” But more of that in a bit.) So, using his terminology, we will be investigating the a priori aspects of the (“faculty” of) “Understanding.”

The crucial point here, I think, is Kant’s claim that the Understanding is a faculty of “judgment,” i.e., that this “conceptualizing” of “data” that we are about to investigate has the same structure as what takes place when we “judge” that (i.e., assert that) something is the case. This is what I’m getting at when I say that for Kant, consciousness of objects (“erkenntniss”) has a propositional structure. In judgement (assertion), I judge (assert) that “something is so-and-so,” while in cognition I become aware of something as so-and-so. In a subject/predicate statement, I have an individual term (the subject) and a general term (the predicate), and then assert a relation between them (that the predicate “applies to” or “is true of” the subject). In cognition, I have an individual representation (an “intuition”) and a general representation (a “concept”), and then “cognize” (have a conscious experience in which I become aware of) something as falling under some general category. Without sensibility (the source of intuitions), there would be no “something” for me to cognize as falling under some general category of things. And without Understanding, I could not recognize this “something” as being any kind of thing. Indeed, as Kant will argue, without the Understanding (and, specifically, without its “pure” or a priori rules), I could not even recognize it as a “something” at all.

So, if any of the above is plausible, then there should be some structural parallel between the ways in which a subject is “united” with a predicate in a judgment and the ways in which something is experienced “as an object” in cognition. This is Kant’s rationale for looking to (General) logic for the basic forms of judgments. Since Understanding operates according to the
“very same functions of unity,” Kant will claim that the “Categories of the Understanding,” i.e.,
the purely formal rules for recognizing sensible data as constituting an experience of something,
must exactly parallel the purely formal rules for how a subject is “united” with a predicate in a
judgment. And so we begin with a “Table of Judgements” and from this derive an exactly
parallel “Table of Categories.”

I am not going to try to justify or even explain the Table of Judgments. There is a certain
arbitrariness to it, and so the Table of Categories will necessarily suffer from the same
arbitrariness. But much of the later structure of the Critique will follow from this Table of
Categories, and so we need to look at least a little more closely at it.

So, what we learn from the table of categories is that:
In every cognition (experience of some thing as being some kind of thing), some aspect of our
experience will necessarily reflect

1) the quantity of the thing experienced;
   a) that it is a unity (that it is a “one”); or
   b) that it is a plurality (that it is a “many”); or
   c) that it is a totality (that it is all); and

2) the quality of what the thing is experienced as being;
   a) that it represents an object as really having some property (Reality); or
   b) that it represents an object as not having some property (Negation); or
   c) that it represents something as being outside the range of some property
      (Limitation); and

3) the relations the thing is experienced as standing in:
   a) to itself (inheritance and subsistence); or
   b) to a previous or subsequent thing (cause and effect); or
   c) to everything else (reciprocity); and

4) the modality of the thing experienced:
   a) that its existence is possible; or
   b) that its existence is actual; or
   c) that its existence is necessary.
More will be said about all this later. For now, I want merely to point out that Kant calls the first two classes “Mathematical” categories, and the later two “Dynamical” categories. More will be said later about what that is supposed to mean. But while all of the categories are supposed to reflect necessary aspects of how we “cognize” the data from sensation as constituting an experience of an object, the Mathematical categories are supposed to be somehow more fundamental: they reflect the necessary rules for understanding this data as being about a specific thing, while the Dynamical categories reflect the rules for understanding the sorts of relations—to other things, or to the possibility of experience—in which these things necessarily stand.

On p. 219 of our text, Kant begins the Second Chapter of the Transcendental Analytic. (Remember that the Transcendental Logic is divided into two mains sections, the Transcendental Analytic, and the Transcendental Dialectic.) This chapter is called “On the Deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding,” and the first section of this chapter is called “On the principles of a transcendental deduction in general.” You may have noticed that the word “transcendental” occurs in the title of the first section, but not in the chapter title. As the context suggests, it should be understood as implicit in the chapter title as well. (It makes sense to start a discussion of “doing X,” whatever that may be, with a discussion of the general principles of “doing X,” but only if the “X” we are “doing” is the same.) And so this section, through page 266 in our text, is often known as the “Transcendental Deduction.” (Given how Kant later explains it, it is sometimes also known as the “Subjective Deduction.”)

Towards the end of this section (on p. 261 in our text), where Kant is summarizing what he has done in this section, he contrasts the results of this “Transcendental Deduction” with something else, called the “Metaphysical Deduction.” This Metaphysical Deduction is understood to include the material immediately preceding the chapter on the “Deduction of the Pure Concepts” (specifically, sections 9-12 of the first chapter of the Analytic, pp. 206–218). So, the Metaphysical Deduction includes the introduction of the table of judgments (on. p. 206)
and the argument that we can infer from this a table of Categories. (The “Categories” there are
the same as the “Pure Concepts” here.) In other words, we have just finished the Metaphysical
Deduction of these Categories or “Pure Concepts,” and we are now about to being their
Transcendental Deduction.

Whatever a “deduction” is (and Kant is about to tell us), it would seem that what we have
just done, the Metaphysical Deduction, must have something in common with what we are about
to do, the Transcendental Deduction. It would appear that these constitute two different ways
(Metaphysical vs. Transcendental) of doing the same thing (“deducing” these pure concepts), or
at least two different varieties of the same basic kind of undertaking. So, before understanding
how the two sections differ, let’s look at what they have in common, i.e., what it means to be a
“Deduction” in the sense in which Kant is using these terms.

Fortunately, Kant tells us in a (relatively!) straightforward way what he means by
“deduction” at the beginning of the current section. To give a deduction of a concept is provide a
justification of its use. (So, unlike the way we use the term in logic classes today, it is not about
proving that one statement follows from some others.) One way of looking at the force of
Hume’s skepticism is to point out that we employ many concepts in our explanations of the
world for which we cannot provide any real justification. We employ, for example, the notion of
a cause, and then go about the business of saying which things in the world cause which other
things. But, Hume argues, no amount of experience could ever be sufficient to establish that
there are any such things. We use the concept, but without justification. It is the purpose of a
deduction, in Kant’s use of the term, to provide just such a justification.

Kant quickly distinguishes transcendental deduction from empirical deduction. An
empirical deduction of a concept would be something like a psychological theory of how we
actually acquired the concept. (Today we might look to biology or cognitive science for such an
explanation.) But explaining how we acquired a concept in the course of experience (which is
how Kant understands much of what Locke does in his Essay Concerning Human
Understanding) is not the same as defending our (if you will) epistemic “right” to use it. That is
what Kant is up to in the Transcendental Deduction. We use concepts like “cause” and
“substance” (i.e., what persists through change), and Hume awakened Kant from his dogmatic
slumber by insisting (rightly, according to Kant) that Locke’s explanation for how we might have acquired such concepts through experience fell far short of a defense of our “right” to use them. And this is exactly what Kant sets out do here.

This still leaves us wondering what a Metaphysical Deduction is supposed to be, and how what we just did is supposed to be in any way similar to what we are about to do. Let me take a very quick stab at it: We have this table of the Categories of the Understanding. Kant thinks these categories are important. In the Metaphysical Deduction he explains (in some loose way) “what they are.” Understanding is a kind of judgment. And so from a table of the basic categories of judgment we can derive a table of the basic categories of the Understanding. This Deduction is Metaphysical because it deduces the Categories of the Understanding from what “they are” (or, at least, from what “Understanding is”).

But “transcendental,” recall, concerns what what we can know \emph{a priori} about cognition, that is, with the necessary conditions for the possibility of cognition. So, a Transcendental Deduction of these Categories would be an argument that they stem from the conditions of the possibility of cognition of objects.

I have already argued, in my previous notes, that Kant will not really be concerned in what follows with the veridicality of experience. So, if “knowledge” presupposes “truth,” Kant will not be concerned in what follows in what makes an experience of an object “true” or veridical. Rather, he will be concerned with the necessary conditions for an experience to constitute a \emph{representation of an object}. So, his concern is with the conditions of the possibility of consciousness of objects. In brief, he will claim that consciousness of object requires certain kinds of rules, what he will call “rules for the synthesis of the manifold of intuition.” The Categories (or, the “Schematized” Categories, to get ahead of ourselves) are supposed to be just these rules. In a following section (where we move from an “Analytic of Concepts” to an “Analytic of Principles”), Kant will argue how these categories (these specific rules of synthesis) generate synthetic \emph{a priori} knowledge of the just the sort we are looking for. But the Transcendental Deduction, which we are about to start, seems to make very little appeal to the specific Categories that Kant derived in the Metaphysical Deduction, and that he needs to make use of in the Analytic of Principles. (“Whoops!”) Even on my unabashedly optimistic reading
of the *Critique*, this is a pretty big gap in the project. Nevertheless, whatever my worries over “where he gets” or “where he’s going” with these rules, my abiding interest in the *Critique* stems from his argument that consciousness essentially involves synthesis according to rules, and that these rules, whatever they may be, leave their “fingerprints” all over the world we become consciously aware of.