

A Defense of the Second Analogy

CAO YUNLONG

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Abstract: In his book, *The Bounds of Sense*, P. F. Strawson commented that Immanuel Kant’s argument in the second analogy “proceeds by a *non sequitur* of numbing grossness,” causing a fair amount of debates. Kant’s task in the second analogy is to argue that every event has a cause. Strawson criticizes Kant by claiming that in his argument, Kant not only changes the content of necessity but also shifts a conceptual necessity to a causal one. In this paper, I defend Kant’s second analogy against Strawson’s objection by arguing that Strawson misinterprets Kant’s strategy.

Keywords: Immanuel Kant, P. F. Strawson, The Second Analogy, Causality

Introduction

In his book, *The Bounds of Sense*, P. F. Strawson commented that Immanuel Kant’s argument in the second analogy “proceeds by a *non sequitur* of numbing grossness,”¹ causing a fair amount of debates. In this paper, I argue that Kant’s argument can be defended against Strawson’s objection because Strawson misinterprets Kant’s strategy. First, I will demonstrate Kant’s account of events; then, I evaluate Strawson’s argument; after that, I reconstruct Kant’s arguments that every event presupposes a cause; finally, I will briefly mention some philosophers’ comments on Strawson’s objection. In this paper, I use the following notations: capitalized letters, A and B, to represent the empirical objective states of an event; capitalized letters with p in subscript, A_p and B_p, to represent the perception or apprehension of an objective state of an event; “–” between letters to represent an event composed by two elements; pre-A to represent the presupposition from which the event A–B follows.

I. Kant’s Account of Events and Objects

The underlying question in Kant’s second analogy is: how are objective experiences of events possible? I argue that Kant has three requirements: 1) an event must be composed of two objective states; 2) an event must not follow from an empty time; 3) the two objective states must follow according to a rule of

apprehension in the manifold, which means the order of the objective states is determined objectively. In this section, I discuss them in order.

Kant first defines an event as “a perception that follows upon another perception.”² An event must be composed of two parts, A and B. We cannot perceive an event unless something contained in state B is not part of state A. This is intuitive: I cannot perceive the event—e.g., the lights turned on—unless I perceive it is bright now and dark seconds ago. If it is always bright, I would never perceive an event. I use the notation A–B to represent the objective experience of an event, such that A is the preceding, and B the succeeding, objective state of appearances.

Kant then claims that an event should not follow from empty time. He writes that “for an event which should follow upon an empty time, that is, a coming to be preceded by no state of things, is as little capable of being apprehended as empty time itself.”³ To perceive an event without a preceding state implies that we can perceive empty time before perceiving such an event. Since Kant has already proved that empty time is not perceivable, it follows that there is always a pre-A preceding A–B. This requirement of an event is an essential step in Kant’s argument for all events must have their causes.

The third requirement, events must have a necessary objective order, takes a few steps to reason. First, to distinguish one event from all our apprehensions, i.e., pre-conceptual “sensory data,” we need a concept of such an event, similar to how we need concepts to distinguish objects from apprehensions. For example, I must have the concept of a table to experience the table in front of me; similarly, I also need the concept of “opening doors” to experience any specific door-opening event. Without such a concept, I cannot pick out relevant apprehensions from the manifold. For example, I might perceive a door opening and a person walking in at the same time. I need my concepts to distinguish which parts of my apprehension belong to which event; without the ability to distinguish, I would have no objective experience: I might perceive A_p–B_p as arbitrary apprehensions, but never A–B as objective events. Therefore, we must have concepts of events.

A question that follows naturally from the third requirement is: what are some necessary rules of apprehension in the concepts of events? Strawson used

¹ Strawson, 136.

² Kant, A192/B237.

³ Ibid.

the term “order-indifference”⁴ to mark the difference between the concepts of events and concepts of objects. Kant thinks that the concepts of an object or co-existing object parts have order-indifference. In contrast, the concepts of an event lack order-indifference: i.e., there is a necessary order of A_p-B_p (A_p-B_p -irreversibility). Kant used examples of a house and a ship to demonstrate.

My objective experience of a house contains a necessary rule of apprehension; however, the rules do not require the order of apprehension.⁵ My apprehension of a house can either start with the roof or the basement: the rules of connection in the manifold guarantee that I can experience the house with order indifference. In contrast, the rule for an objective event requires a determined order. If a ship moves downstream, I always perceive it first in a position higher up, then lower down.⁶ In the event of $A-B$, I always perceive A_p-B_p -irreversibility. A_p-B_p alone is not enough for an objective experience of an event. I cannot perceive my objective concept $A-B$ as sometimes A_p-B_p and sometimes B_p-A_p . One may argue that sometimes one does perceive the representation B_p-A_p : e.g., one can first see the ship in a position lower down, then see it higher up; she can reverse the engine. However, this kind of objection bears no significance. Kant does not need to argue that some representations never precede others; he only argues that in cases of events, the order of perceptions is necessary. One sure can perceive B_p-A_p ; however, that would be a perception of event $B-A$ instead of $A-B$.

Moreover, when one perceives the event $B-A$, she must perceive B_p-A_p -irreversibility. If I first perceive the room as dark, then the room as bright, I perceived the event of lights-turning-on; if I first perceive the room as bright, then the room as dark, I perceive the event of lights-turning-off. There is a clear difference between the two. Thus, we can conclude that for any event $A-B$, my perception of an event follows a necessary order, A_p-B_p -irreversibility.

Lastly, why must A_p-B_p -irreversibility come from the rules under the concepts $A-B$? Kant claims: “we must derive the subjective succession of apprehension from the objective succession of appearances.”⁷ Since we need to have the objective

experience, the necessity of our apprehensions must not come from our understanding; otherwise, the order of apprehension would be arbitrary. Kant writes, “the objective succession will therefore consist in that order of the manifold of appearance.”⁸ The objective order must be given to me in the manifold already. Like how I perceive an object, my apprehension must follow the specific rules of the manifold, according to which I cannot help but experience an object in a specific way. For example, I cannot resist experiencing a table upside-down if the rule in the manifold makes me do so; similarly, I cannot help but experience a door opening instead of closing if the rules in the manifold require it. Kant summarizes by saying that “this is another way of saying that I cannot arrange the apprehension otherwise than in this very succession.”⁹

It is worth noting that Kant has not yet accomplished that an event $A-B$ follows from a cause necessarily. Instead, Kant proves that one can experience the event only in the way the event happens: what I can experience is determined already in the manifold because my sensibility is merely passive and receptive. I will discuss Kant’s argument that all events are caused in section three. Briefly, Kant points out three requirements for the experience of an event. 1) An event must have two parts, A and B; 2) an event must follow from some other objective state, pre-A; 3) the order of perception of an event is always necessary, such that B_p follows from A_p according to a rule in the manifold. I now reconstruct Strawson’s notorious *non sequitur* criticism on Kant’s Second Analogy.

II. Strawson’s *Non Sequitur* Objection

Strawson claims that Kant “not only shifts the application of the word ‘necessary,’ but also changes its sense substituting one type of necessity for another.”¹⁰ He reconstructs Kant’s premises as it is necessary that if $A-B$, then A_p-B_p -irreversibility; he writes,

It is conceptually necessary, given that what is observed is, in fact, a change from A to B, and that there is no such difference in the causal conditions of the perception of these two states as to introduce a differential time-lag into the perception of A, that the observer’s perceptions should have the order:

⁴ Strawson, 132.

⁵ Kant, A190-191/B235-236.

⁶ Ibid., A192/B237.

⁷ Ibid., A193/B238.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Strawson, 137.

perception of A, perception of B – and not the reverse order.¹¹

Strawson thinks that A_p 's dependence on A is the same as B_p 's dependence on B. James Van Cleve, in his reconstruction of Strawson, called this idea “perceptual isomorphism.”¹² Given that A–B and perceptual isomorphism, it conceptually necessarily follows that A_p – B_p -irreversibility. I think Kant would agree with this premise: one's apprehension follows the order of her objective experience. For example, when I experience a door opening (A–B), I first have an apprehension of the door being closed (A_p), then have an apprehension of the door being open (B_p). Strawson thinks it is only a conceptual necessity that A_p – B_p -irreversibility follows from A–B because it is not the case that A–B caused the order of their apprehension to be necessary; the necessity follows from the concept of perceptual isomorphism.

Strawson then reads Kant's conclusion as a causal necessity, as Kant describes in his thesis: “everything that happens, that is, begins to be, presupposes something upon which it follows according to a rule.”¹³ It is worth noting that Kant is not trying to argue A–B-necessity, objective state A causally necessitating objective state B. As Strawson points out that “Kant does not say that to conceive the order of perceptions of A and B as necessary is equivalent to conceiving A as causally necessitating B. He says that it is equivalent to conceiving the change from A to B as causally necessitated by some unspecified antecedent conditions.”¹⁴ In other words, Kant concludes that pre-A–(A–B)-necessity, for any event there presupposes a condition from which the event necessarily follows; instead of A–B-necessity, A causally necessitating B.

Strawson thinks Kant cannot conclude that pre-A–(A–B)-necessity with the premise A_p – B_p -irreversibility. Kant derived his conclusion by shifting the application of “necessity” from 1) necessarily if A–B then A_p – B_p to 2) A–B necessarily follows from pre-A. Simultaneously, the sense of “necessity” shifted from a conceptual necessity to a causal necessity. I agree that if this is Kant's strategy, he would be guilty of *non sequitur*; however, I disagree that Kant's argument proceeds in this direction. I argue Kant did not achieve pre-A–(A–B)-necessity through the necessary order of one's perception of an event;

instead, Kant's argument for the cause of events follows from the mere possibility of an objective experience of events.

III. Kant's Arguments for the Causal Principle

In this section, I reconstruct Kant's arguments that all events are caused basing on the mere possibility of objective experience. In previous sections, I have shown that Kant requires necessary relations between the two perceptions of an event: i.e., A_p – B_p -irreversibility if A–B are events. Kant's next step is to argue that any event A–B presupposes something, pre-A, upon which it follows according to a rule: i.e., pre-A–(A–B)-necessity. Kant's argument is based on that certain rules are required for objectivity. He says, “I render my subjective synthesis of apprehension objective only by reference to a rule in accordance with which the appearances in their succession, that is, as they happen, are determined by the preceding state. The experience of an event [i.e., of anything as happening] is itself possible only on this assumption.”¹⁵ I now demonstrate Kant's arguments.

Kant argues that an event needs a determinate position in time to be objective.¹⁶ I do not need to know the precise time when an event happens; instead, Kant only claims that I have to put the event into the temporal framework to experience it: e.g., I have to know the door opens after I push the door and before the dog walks out. I have to provide every event with a determinate position in time to have experience. This is similar to how we must provide a determinate spot in space to experience an object. I cannot objectively experience an a-spatial table; similarly, I cannot say I experience an event without knowing its temporal position. The next question for Kant is, from what authority can events obtain a determinate temporal position?

Recall from the last section that all events presuppose something preceding them, pre-A because we cannot perceive empty time. Kant argues that I have to presuppose that any event, A–B, necessarily follows from something preceding, pre-A, to satisfy the determined time relation. Moreover, since this time relation is objectively determined, there must be a governing rule in the manifold; I cannot provide such a rule myself, which would be arbitrary. Kant argues that “[an event] can acquire this determinate position

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Van Cleve, 82.

¹³ Kant, A189.

¹⁴ Strawson, 137.

¹⁵ Kant, A195/B240.

¹⁶ Ibid., A198/B243.

in this relation of time only in so far as something is presupposed in the preceding state upon which it follows invariably, that is, in accordance with a rule.”¹⁷ In other words, Kant argues that since all events have determined time relation, which can only derive from rules in the concept of objects, and that time only flows in one direction, we conclude that an event can only acquire its determinate time relation from its preceding cause.

Back to Strawson’s objection, The Kantian concept of events has two necessities: (1) the necessary irreversible order of perception given any event and (2) the necessary temporal determination of an event given its preceding cause. I have shown that Kant’s argument that every event has a cause does not follow from (1), which Strawson claims he does. Instead, Kant treats the entire event, A–B, as a whole and argues the event can only be experienced if it has a determined time relation, which should follow upon a rule. In our case, the rule for the ordering is causation. Strawson’s objection rests only on the assumption that Kant argues for objective causation based on subjective apprehensions; however, this is not the case. Therefore, Strawson’s objection fails. Next, I wish to defend Kant’s view against three possible objections.

One possible objection Kant addressed is that events might acquire their determinate temporal relation directly from their relation to absolute time. If each event is marked with a specific time in the manifold, events will not follow from each other necessarily. For example, it could be the case that a rule in the manifold says that “Kant pushes the door at a second before five” and that “the door opens at five o’clock,” instead of “the door opens after Kant pushes it.” Since we have no access to the rules in the manifolds, how can we rule out the former option and claim that events must acquire their temporal relation through each other?

Kant argued that “since absolute time is not an object of perception, this determination of position cannot be derived from the relation of appearances to it. On the contrary, the appearances must determine for one another their position in time and make their time-order a necessary order.”¹⁸ Appearances can only acquire determined relations from other appearances. Time is only the form of sensibility, which has no determinate markers to bear relations to appearances: the rules can only say A–B follows pre-A, but never

A–B happens at five o’clock because the absolute five o’clock is not an object of perception. Therefore, events must acquire their determined relations among each other according to the rules.

Another possible objection Kant addressed is that there might be simultaneous causes.¹⁹ For example, a lead ball is causing a hollow on a cushion. The ball must be on the cushion at the same time when the hollow exists; if I remove the ball, the hollow will disappear. Kant agrees that there could be simultaneous causation; however, he also pointed out, “it is the order of time, not the lapse of time, with which we have to reckon.”²⁰ The order of time still exists even when there is no lapse in time. Let us scrutinize the event: a hollow appears on a cushion: the first perception is a flat cushion, A; the second perception is a cushion with a hollow, B; the condition is the placing of the lead ball, pre-A. We can see that the posit of pre-A will necessarily lead to the event, A–B, where A–B would not lead to pre-A. Therefore, we can determine that the event A–B shall follow pre-A in the order of time. The necessary temporal relation is determined by order of time, not the lapse of time.

Here is another possible objection: why must it be the case that what determines the temporal relation between events corresponds to what we perceive as causal relations? We perceive so many events at any given time, even if there must be some pre-A; how do we know it picks out the one we want, i.e., the one of causation? Take the door-opening event for example: I pushed the door, then the door opens. The moment right before I open the door, I happen to turn on the lights as well. In this case, we have two pre-A candidates for the event A–B of door-opening: (1) turning on the lights and (2) pushing the door. (2) causally determines A–B while (1) is just a random event; however, they both can determine A–B in temporal order. How can we guarantee that the rules in the manifold are the causal relation?

I think Kant would argue that, if it is the case that we arrange door-opening after lights-turning-on, then we would think that lights-turning-on *causes* door-opening. However, we do arrange door-opening after door-pushing, and we know this because we perceive door-pushing as causing door-opening. The rules already determine the causal relations in the manifold. We are in no position to alter; otherwise, our experience is not *objective*. If it is really the case that

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., A200/B245.

¹⁹ Ibid., A202-203/B247-248.

²⁰ Ibid., A203/B248.

lights-turning-on causes door opening, potentially how alien determines event order, then they will not feel weird about this determination. An alien philosopher might ask why it is not the case that door-pushing causes door-opening; a similar response is available. Objective experience requires rules coming from the manifold. Kant does not have to worry if the determined temporal order mismatches with causation because it is causation.

From the above argument, we can get two consequences, as Kant claimed: “in the first place, I cannot reverse the series, placing that which happens prior to that upon which it follows. And secondly, if the state which precedes is posited, this determinate event follows inevitably and necessary.”²¹ I cannot reverse the objective series because of the governing rules in the manifolds; events inevitably follow from their conditions. If the necessary time relation fails, no appearances would be possible at all. Kant says that “the principle of sufficient reason is thus the ground of possible experiences, that is, of objective knowledge of appearances in respect of their relation in the order of time.”²²

In brief, Kant first argues that for any event A–B, one necessarily presupposes something, pre-A, before A–B. Also, for both pre-A and A–B to be objective, i.e., not merely subjective apprehensions, they need to have temporal positions. Their relationship is determined in the objects, according to rules in the manifolds. Finally, Kant shows that pre-A and A–B’s temporal position can only derive from relating to each other rather than relating to absolute time. Kant concludes that to experience any event A–B, one needs to presuppose from something Pre-A, from which A–B necessarily follows according to a rule.

I wish to clarify that the causation defended in the second analogy might not be as strong as our ordinary conception of causation: it is only a necessity for our objective and conceptual experiences of events. In our everyday life, we may think causation is a real relation between real events in the world. For example, my throwing of rock actually causes a window to break. However, Kant would argue that the causation is only necessary because my perception of the rock-throwing precedes my perception of the window breaking. Although this may sound unsatisfactory, it is not because the Kantian strategy is inadequate. Instead,

it is because we ask too much of necessity in our everyday life. We cannot directly access the objects in themselves; thus, we cannot attribute causation to them.

IV. Commentators’ Replies to Strawson

Henry Allison argues that Strawson’s *non sequitur* objection assumes a “transcendentally realistic standpoint.”²³ He claims that Strawson “treats Kant as if he were an empirical idealist, concerned to ground a conclusion regarding the causal relations of ontologically distinct things and events on a feature of our perceptions (their irreversibility).”²⁴ Strawson’s objection would be sound if Kant shifts the causal necessity of objective experience to the causal necessity of objects in themselves; however, we are not even entitled to argue for order in the noumenal world. At the beginning of his argument, Kant claimed that “how things may be in themselves, apart from the representations through which they affect us, is entirely outside our sphere of knowledge.”²⁵ One has to pay attention to the requirement that objects in the phenomenal realm need to be constructed by us according to the rules.

Lewis Beck also points out that Kant does not draw the inference Strawson objects against, namely from A_p-B_p -irreversibility to A–B-irreversibility, which would be a *non sequitur*. Beck claims that the former is only one evidence for me to know an event A–B, where the latter is a rule which is also necessary for me to regard A–B as a necessary event²⁶, which I think Kant derived independently from the former. The apprehension’s irreversibility is necessary under the concept of any event, while the causal necessity rests on the objective temporal order of appearances. The rule and the evidence together enable us to experience events objectively.

Michael Rosen points out that Strawson is wrong by assuming series of events and asking whether those events are objective; however, for Kant, one only has series of apprehensions that need to be synthesized into objective events. Kant’s project is to determine the rules, according to which we can match our subjective apprehensions to the objective experience. He writes that “the constraint upon those rules is that they must be such as to allow us to order what is given to us into a seamless and coherent

²¹ Ibid., A198/B243-244.

²² Ibid., A201/B246.

²³ Allison, 255.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kant, A191/B235.

²⁶ Beck, 389.

reality.”²⁷ Without such rules, e.g., causation, the objective experience is impossible.

Conclusion

Commentators disagree on whether Kant argues that objective state B follows from objective state A according to a rule, or he argues that the event A–B follows from a presupposed pre-A according to a rule. I think this distinction is subtle: whether causation resides between objective states or between events. Both objective states and events belong to our objective experience, where they necessarily require a relative temporal position. Kant’s argument flows on both reads of his causality, where Strawson’s objection flows on neither.

Kant argued that under the concept of any event, the perceptions must acquire necessary orders. Strawson reads this necessity as the reason Kant uses to prove that every event has a cause, on which He charged Kant of shifting both the application and the sense of necessity in his argument. However, I argue that Kant’s argument does not advance in the direction Strawson attributed to him; Kant achieved the causal necessity based on the relative temporal order between event, which is required for our objective experience; instead of the conceptually necessary perceptual isomorphism, on which Strawson based his attack. I think Strawson mistakenly read Kant’s argument of pre-A–(A–B)-necessity as following from A_p–B_p-irreversibility; however, Kant’s arguments are based on the necessity of our experience of events. Therefore, Kant’s argument can be defended against Strawson’s objection.²⁸

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²⁷ Rosen, 18.

²⁸ I wish to thank Prof. Eckart Förster for his teaching and the audience at the 2021 EMU Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy for their helpful comments.