

## The Transcendental Turn

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Kant's influence on the history of philosophy is vast and protean. The transcendental turn denotes one of its most important forms, defined by the notion that Kant's deepest insight should not be identified with any specific epistemological or metaphysical doctrine, but rather concerns the fundamental standpoint and terms of reference of philosophical enquiry. To take the transcendental turn is not to endorse any of Kant's specific teachings, but to accept that the Copernican revolution announced in the Preface of the *Critique of Pure Reason* sets philosophy on a new footing and constitutes the proper starting point of philosophical reflection.

The question of what precisely defines the transcendental standpoint has both historical and systematic aspects. It can be asked, on the one hand, what different construals have been put on Kant's Copernican revolution and what different historical forms the transcendental project has assumed, and on the other, how transcendental philosophy, in abstraction from its historical instances, should be defined and practised. Though separable, the two questions are best taken together. In so far as historical interest has a critical dimension, it will constantly broach systematic issues, just as any convincing account of the nature of transcendental philosophy will need to take account of the historical development. The present volume examines the history of the transcendental turn with the dual aim of elucidating the thought of individual philosophers, and of bringing into clearer view the existence of a transcendental tradition, intertwined with but distinguishable from other, more configurations in late modern philosophy. It is intended also that, by giving systematic shape to historical material, a resource will be provided for systematic reflection on transcendental philosophy.

The difficulties involved in any attempt at a definition are considerable, but there is evidently need at the outset for a statement of the broad contours of any philosophical position that can be regarded as transcendental. Something along the following lines may be suggested. (i) Involved in the transcendental turn in the first instance, is an acceptance of the *necessity of metaphysics*, or at any rate of some distinctively philosophical form of reflection which goes beyond empirical enquiry, along with a *criticism of earlier metaphysics* as methodologically naive, with the implication that even if correct results have been reached earlier in the history of philosophy, these have not been adequately grounded or formulated. (ii) Associated with the view that metaphysics in some form or other is required, is an acceptance of the need for *final justifications* of some sort. Characteristically associated with this commitment is a recognition of the force of, and a willingness to engage with, the challenge posed by skepticism. (iii) As regards the means by which final justifications are to be provided and the form which they are to take, the Copernican revolution dictates that the foundations of knowledge derive in some manner from, or at least are to be discovered by reflection on, powers, capacities and cognitive requirements of the *knowing subject*, and that they take the form of what Kant refers to as *conditions of possibility*, a concept that admits of various interpretations but which on all accounts contrasts with a direct appeal to matters of psychological fact. (iv) Consequent upon their separation from psychological grounds, transcendental conditions of possibility are regarded as having a rational and normative character, and as forming a systematic unity, giving rise to the notion of *transcendental logic*, which it is the task of transcendental philosophy to spell out. (v) As regards the means by which we come to grasp transcendental conditions and the basis on which we claim knowledge of their necessity, it again follows from their subjective yet non-psychological character that the transcendental turn demands a distinctive mode of *transcendental proof* or *transcendental argumentation*, either not found in the toolkit of pre-Kantian philosophy or, if present, then not explicitly theorized as such.

Other elements arguably merit inclusion in a basic statement of the transcendental turn. In particular it may be suggested that the integration of theoretical with practical philosophy, the

exhibition of parallels between cognition and action, is not an accidental feature of the transcendental project.<sup>1</sup> While this contention is plausible and, if correct, of high importance, we should content ourselves at this point with a rough and ready, non-exhaustive sketch of the thin 'core' of the transcendental turn, since what is most wanted, for the historical purposes of this volume, is not a set of necessary and sufficient conditions but a conception of a distinctive *strategy* of maximal philosophical generality developed by Kant yet allowing itself to be executed in different ways and susceptible to revision.<sup>2</sup> According to (i)–(v), a post-Kantian development incorporates the transcendental turn if it seeks to justify claims to knowledge of the necessities that govern things by reflection on and reference to the subject conceived in a non-empirical respect. To say this is not to endorse Kant's own epistemology and metaphysics, and it leaves ample room for disagreement concerning many issues: what should go under the headings of 'transcendental logic' and 'transcendental proof', what the 'systematic unity' of transcendental conditions may amount to, what counts as 'deriving from the subject', what weight should be attached to skeptical worries and the whole *questio juris*, what 'non-empirical subjectivity' might consist in, and so forth. There is a further sense in which a philosophical development, even when it is not only short of recognizably Kantian first-order doctrinal commitments but also rejects the full package of (i)–(v), may be regarded as belonging to the transcendental tradition, namely when it has come into existence by way of a critique of the Kantian transcendental strategy. Certain developments in late modern philosophy may be regarded as having worked through the transcendental option and as owing their intelligibility and suasiveness, in part at least, to their endeavour to resolve aporiae in, and 'overcome', Kant's transcendentalism. Whether we describe these as post-transcendental, or as revisionary forms of transcendentalism, will depend on the nature of the individual case.

That the transcendental turn tracks a theme in the history of philosophy will seem obvious to those accustomed to viewing the late modern development through Kantian eyes, but less so to those whose view of the philosophical geography is determined by some other trigonometric point. It is therefore worth pointing out that the notion of the transcendental turn can be employed for the

purpose of historical understanding without Kantian commitment. To grant its integrity as a historical category is not to affirm that the transcendental project is in the final systematic analysis coherent. What the historical narrative may reveal, indeed, is the impossibility of designing a form of transcendental philosophy that is free from contradictions. This possibility, however disappointing it would prove, cannot be ruled out *ab initio*. Equally it should be regarded as strictly an open question how much of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy is accurately described or well explained as following a transcendental agenda.<sup>3</sup> Again it may transpire that, contrary to the expectations voiced above, the concept of the transcendental turn fails to get significant purchase on historical figures who depart from Kantian orthodoxy, making the transcendental tradition effectively indistinguishable from the neo-Kantian tradition. This too cannot be dismissed in advance. In short, it remains to be seen what results from pursuing the hypothesis that the transcendental turn defines an autonomous vector in nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy. Even if the conclusions we come to are negative, they will nonetheless be instructive. The important point, and the sole premise of this collection, is that a number of the most important and creative philosophers of the last two centuries either present their thought, or allow themselves to be fruitfully interpreted, as not simply of Kantian descent but as incorporating a *metaphilosophical* insight owed to Kant and approximately captured in (i)–(v). The philosophers treated in this collection are candidates for being viewed in such terms, as the secondary literature on each attests, though their inclusion here indicates only that there is an issue to be decided concerning their relation to the transcendental turn, not which way the decision should fall. As will be seen, the contributors to this volume take different views of the transcendental credentials of the figures they discuss, as they do also, I should stress, of the general issues surrounding the concept of transcendental philosophy discussed in this introduction.

If the transcendental turn constitutes an abiding theme in post-Kantian philosophy, then it ought to be possible to say something at a general level about why the transcendental option has seemed

compelling to so many of Kant's successors and over such a long period. Many factors of course contribute to Kant's extraordinary reception history, but if we restrict attention to the metaphilosophical component of Kant's theoretical philosophy, then the plausible answer is that its power lies in Kant's demonstration that empiricism and rationalism in their classical forms are untenable, for reasons that go deep and pertain to their shared ultimate presuppositions, and that progress in metaphysics and vindication of the objectivity assumed in ordinary thought demand a heightened philosophical self-consciousness, which must take subjectivity, conceived however in terms that avoid the errors of Descartes and Hume, as its starting point. This positive estimate is compatible with a perception of Kant as having failed to develop fully or articulate properly the transcendental standpoint—transcendental philosophy may be considered to hold a potential which Kant has left unexploited, or to require the elimination of tensions in order for existing gains to be consolidated, or both. What follows is intended to give an idea of the sorts of issues to which the transcendental project by its nature gives rise, its constant preoccupations and characteristic trajectories. They reflect, as may be expected, perennial issues in Kant interpretation. In order not to get drawn into the substantial interpretative issues discussed in the papers that make up this volume, I will sketch the challenges facing and the possibilities open to transcendentalism in abstraction from the question of which historical figures they map onto.

### **1. Transcendental Idealism**

Kant presents the transcendental turn as a turn *to* transcendental idealism. Though Kant does not dwell on the distinction, it is clear that two 'moments' are involved. Transcendental idealism comprises a first-order thesis concerning the objects, scope and limits of human cognition. The Copernican formula, the injunction to proceed 'with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition [*Erkenntnisart*]' (Bxvi), provides its metaphilosophical and methodological complement. That they are conceptually separate, and their relation complex,

becomes clear when we see how the case for transcendental idealism is made out in the first *Critique*.

If Kant's argument consisted simply and solely in a demonstration of the subjectivity of space and time, based on premises drawn from ordinary thought, then transcendental idealism might be viewed as a first-order metaphysical thesis of much broader scope than, but of the same order as, the thesis that secondary qualities are subjective. But there are compelling reasons for thinking that even Kant's arguments concerning space and time presuppose a framework which need to be made explicit, and that in any case the Transcendental Aesthetic is merely the beginning of Kant's explication of transcendental idealism, so that it is only when the *Critique* has run its course that we come to grasp its full meaning. The following will help to bring out the point.

One familiar Kantian line of thought, associated with the Fourth Paralogism, takes its cue from skepticism. Let it be granted that the skeptic succeeds in showing the global failure of our claims to knowledge of objects, in the sense of things that exist independently of our cognizing them and which, as so existing, possess the intrinsic constitution which our cognitions represent them as having. It remains true nonetheless that we continue to seem to be presented with, and can continue to refer to, the putatively cognized and seemingly real objects which, prior to the skeptical onslaught, we took to safely meet the conditions of justified true belief. The skeptic may have razed our claims to knowledge to the ground, but as Hume stressed, skeptical arguments do not abolish the appearance of a real world and the epistemic seemings which accompany it—presented with what looks to be a blue ball, 'here is a blue ball' will continue to seem to have greater justification than its negation. And what this shows, Kant may be construed as arguing, is that we have a choice as to how we picture our epistemic situation. For what we might think is that the conception of a real object to which we were previously committed, the conception to which we subscribed in our dialogue with the skeptic, is a misconception; and that the correct conception of a real object is that of a thing which meets the full conditions of epistemic seeming, that is, a thing in so far as it agrees with our cognition.

If we take this revisionary, Copernican option, then we will be left, on the face of it, with uncertainty on two fronts. For we will not be able to claim either (a) that objects as we cognize them do not, in fact, exist just as we cognize them independently of our cognition, nor (b) that, if objects as we cognize them exist only within our cognition, there do not also exist somewhere in reality other objects which are independent of our cognition. But agnosticism regarding how things are independently of our cognition is arguably a small price to pay for security from skeptical onslaught.

The Copernican option will nonetheless have a somewhat hollow quality—as if amounting to a disguised capitulation to the skeptic—if nothing more is said about what it is for an object to 'agree with our cognition'. But here the second familiar Kantian line of thought, associated with the Transcendental Analytic, comes in. Let it be granted that, as Kant maintains, only certain types of objects are possible objects of cognition for us.<sup>4</sup> This allows itself to be developed into the stronger thesis that, whatever the objects which come our way may be like in themselves, we are bound to represent them in the terms that our power of cognition requires and makes available: such that, even if the objects of our cognition are in fact, in themselves, exactly as we represent them, it is not *because and in virtue* of their having this independent constitution that we represent them in the way that we do. If that is so, then the balance immediately tips in favour of the Copernican option: for if we are necessitated, irrespective of how things are in themselves, to represent objects as being of a certain kind, then it makes no sense to think of objects in the old way; to do so is to make the relation of knowledge contingent, an unaccountable fortuitous coincidence of how things are in themselves with how things need to be in order for us to represent them as objects—in short, just the type of ungrounded contingent relation that the skeptic made merry with. The choice we faced earlier has now become straightforward: rather than conceive objects in a way that leaves us open to skeptical doubt and allows nothing to qualify as strictly knowable, we should conceive them in a way that secures their knowability.

If this is a fair representation of the sorts of considerations involved in transcendental idealism,<sup>5</sup> then Kant's thesis that the objects of our cognition are appearances is not of the same order as, say, Leibniz's thesis that bodies *qua* given in perceptual experience are merely well-founded phenomena, or Spinoza's thesis that finite particulars are modes. Something akin to an element of decision is involved in transcendental idealism—a reflective judgement concerning how it is best for us to think, how we should conceive our knowledge and its objects in light of our epistemic ambitions.<sup>6</sup> This explains why we talk of the transcendental *turn*, with the implication of a shift of paradigm, in a way that we do not of a Leibnizian or Spinozistic turn. It agrees also with Kant's preference for juridical metaphors: just as a court of law decides in a case of disputed property not what is empirically the case but a matter of rightfulness, so philosophical reflection is concerned in the first place with conceptual probity, fulfilment of the subjective needs of our power of cognition, not the obtaining of metaphysical states of affairs (the latter is to be determined by way of the former).

Transcendental idealism has therefore, to state the obvious, a complex structure. Kant proceeds at distinguishable levels, on the one hand focussing on and reinterpreting the very concept of objecthood,<sup>7</sup> and at another level advancing theses correlating specific formal features of objects with specific features of our mode of cognition. We may refer, I have suggested, to the former as Kant's transcendental turn, and to the latter as Kant's transcendental idealism.<sup>8</sup> Importantly, the sense in which Kant's position is 'idealistic' is clearly original, for it appears to involve no claim about the ideational or mental *nature* of objects, nor is the object's relation of 'conformity to our mode of cognition' a relation of mental dependence of any Berkeleyan or other familiar kind. To that extent, Kant appears not to 'subjectivize' reality, and the sense, whatever it may be exactly, in which his idealism contrasts with and precludes 'realism' does not seem worrisome.

Yet, as the history of Kant reception attests, this is not the end of the matter. It is true that transcendental idealism as just explicated does not comprise a judgement that knowers exercise a causal power to bestow form on objects, in the way that the doctrine of the subjectivity of colour



contains the thesis that our visual apparatus projects sensational qualities onto the surfaces of physical objects. But it is not clear that *some such* first-order metaphysical, mentalistic-idealist story, whereby the mind performs an operation of form-imposition on sensational matter, will not need to be told at some point—namely, if we seek to explain *how* the conformity of objects to our mode of cognition is secured. Kant's own theory of synthesis appears to take up just this task, which arguably needs to be completed if contingency is to be eliminated from the knowledge relation.<sup>9</sup> The worry that Kant's transcendental turn leads into a phenomenalist reduction casts a long shadow over the history of transcendental philosophy.

To the extent that transcendental idealism is perceived as entailing a global subjectivization of reality, there is a powerful motive for undertaking to adjust the implications of the transcendental turn as regards the opposition of realism and idealism. The correction may take various forms: it may be argued that, properly understood, the transcendental turn leads to a robust realism; or that it is neutral, without implications one way or the other; or that the idealism to which it leads is genuinely free of subjectivizing first-order metaphysical implications and can lay claim to the title of a synthetic 'realism-idealism'.

## **2. Conditions of Possibility**

Turning to the concept of a transcendental condition, we find the same ambiguity regarding subjectivity reappearing, but also a new set of complexities.

It is not in doubt that Kant is concerned with the conditions under which we can have knowledge of objects. However, a transcendental condition cannot simply be a 'condition of cognition' without further qualification, since formal logical requirements and empirical states of affairs may also be described as such. What makes a condition of cognition transcendental is the specific nature of the necessity that it asserts, and the basis on which it is held to be known. Now the question is this. Once it has been determined, on appropriately transcendental grounds, that a

certain sensible or conceptual form—spatiality or causal order, for example—is a condition of objective cognition, has everything been said that needs to be said, or is something still owing?

One extremely broad and far-reaching issue concerns the *depth of explanation* required for transcendental purposes, the question of how far back in the order of grounds transcendental enquiry needs to go in order for its picture of our epistemic situation to be secure and transparent. The conditions which figure in the conclusions of transcendental proofs, and which specify the form of objects *qua* their transcendently conditioning, comprise 'front-line' conditions of possibility of objects. Once these have been determined, it can then be asked—or if cannot, then it needs to be explained why it cannot—what underlies them. In which case transcendental philosophy will be launched into a second wave of enquiry, into 'background' transcendental conditions, conditions of the conditions which directly make objects possible. These second-level conditions, it may be argued, need to be grasped if we are not simply to know *which* necessities govern our cognition, but also to have *insight* into them.

The question whether or not it is necessary to extend transcendental enquiry into something closer to metaphysical explanation sharply divides Kant's successors, and it is not hard to see how the case can be made either way. On the one hand, it would seem part of the original sense of the transcendental turn, a concomitant of its critique of pre-Critical metaphysics, that knowledge of front-line transcendental conditions be deemed sufficient. Thus it may be argued that once we have grasped the functional congruence of certain objectual forms with our mode of cognition, the relevant transcendental necessity *has* been explained; to ask for explanation in any other, stronger sense is to abandon the principles of transcendentalism. On the other hand, it seems that nothing in the concept of transcendental grounding forbids our asking, in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason, *why* our cognition should be such that it necessitates certain objectual forms, and arguably the ambition of providing final justifications warrants this further enquiry.

The other issue that arises is narrower, and again marks a sharp division in construals of the transcendental turn, related to the one just described.

On one view, purely *epistemological* characterizations are *sufficient* to give the full essence of transcendental conditions. For instance: transcendental conditions may be identified with conditions under which beliefs are justified or become candidates for justification.<sup>10</sup> This gives transcendental philosophy a ready intelligibility and accords with its anti-skeptical thrust, and it has been the dominant view at least since Neo-Kantianism. As might have been expected in view of the Neo-Kantians' ambition to steer a course between materialism's rejection of the *a priori*, which destroys objective knowledge, and German Idealism's perceived regression from transcendental philosophy to dogmatic speculation, which jeopardizes the authority of philosophical reason, we find in Hermann Cohen and his successors a series of explicit attempts to put the transcendental turn in focus. The following passage from Ernst Cassirer provides a clear and precise statement of how the transcendental turn, epistemologically conceived, may be held to fulfil the aim of giving transcendental conditions enough reality of the right kind:

The essential characteristic of Kant's transcendental method consists in the fact that it operates not in the realm of empirically real things or events, but purely and exclusively in the realm of *truths* and their ideal mode of validity. Here it is asked, not what a thing is or is not, nor what properties it possesses or what effects proceed from it, but what necessary and universal judgements precede all others. For according to Kant 'transcendental' applies to those cognitions which are concerned not so much with objects as with our mode of cognition of objects, in so far as these are to be possible *a priori*. Not the structure of objects, but the structure of judgements of empirical knowledge, by virtue of which alone objects can be known and given, stands first in line;—it is not the final ground of being which is to be disclosed, but the principles and conditions of mathematical certainty on the one side and of empirical certainty on the other, which are to be determined. In this way the pure forms of intuition and fundamental concepts of the pure understanding are discovered. We comprehend the ground of their validity when we grasp that they are not borrowed from

objects but are themselves the original functions of objectual connection. Thus transcendental logic as a pure all-comprehension [Inbegriff] of *rules* becomes the norm for all statements about *being*. For the being of which we have in general systematic knowledge can be grasped by us only in *judgement*;—the truth of derived judgements presupposes that of fundamental judgements. Once these have been reached, it is impossible for them to be grounded in anything further, and no *being*, whether psychic or physical, empirical or metaphysical, can be designated as that on which they depend or that through which they are justified. On the contrary, 'deduction' must proceed here in the opposite direction: it must be shown that all *claims* regarding any such being already imply the validity and truth of those judgements and so that any attempted derivation of them from things would be circular.

Such a *circulus vitiosus* is what necessarily results as soon as the question of Critical philosophy is taken out of its own proper domain;—as soon as we ask not about an ideal 'dependence' of truths, but about a real dependence of the subject on the object or vice versa. For whatever may be the ultimate answer to this question, the very posing of it displaces the original *logical* relation of validity, the relation of super- or subordination within the system of knowledge, into a *metaphysical* relation of 'inherence' or causality.<sup>11</sup>

The central distinction exploited by Cassirer, we see, is that of purely normative from existentially committed claims. Transcendental conditions on his account are necessarily without ontological commitment, and this feature is more fundamental than their non-empirical character. As Cassirer argues the point, any ontological component or grounding of transcendental conditions would in the first place be redundant—it could contribute nothing to the justification of principles without having itself been validated by those principles—and secondly it would abort the task of justification by substituting non-normative description for transcendental analysis. Immunity to skeptical attack, it may also be argued, imposes the same requirement: if transcendental knowledge is premised on claims to knowledge of anything existent, then it is open to challenge concerning our presumed

epistemic access to the entity in question (no less so in the case of mental 'faculties' than in that of external objects).

Cassirer's account may be probed on several fronts. In particular, it may be asked how the spheres of the 'ideal' (normative) and the 'real' (factual) are connected, as it seems they must be, if the former is to determine the latter, as Cassirer appears to affirm. As he explains matters, the 'fundamental judgements' which constitute the presuppositions of objective knowledge refer us to the pure forms of sensibility and understanding, which constitute 'the original functions of objectual connection'. There is therefore, it would seem, a derivation of the 'real' from the 'ideal', or an informing of the former by the latter, and the relation which this presupposes must presumably itself be real; making it hard to understand how transcendental grounds can be of a purely epistemological nature.

The difficulty facing Cassirer points to a general reason for considering the epistemological characterization of transcendental conditions too minimal. Kant is explicit that conditions of possibility are not just conditions of the possibility of judgements or claims to knowledge, but also conditions of *things*, the *objects* of judgements. For example:

we can readily grasp the possibility of community (of substances as appearances) if we represent them in space, thus in outer intuition. For this already contains [...] conditions of the possibility of the real (in effect and countereffect, thus in community).—It can just as easily be established that the possibility of things as **magnitudes** [...] can also be exhibited only in outer intuition. (B293)

It may be replied that talk of conditions of possibility of substances and their real relations, of things and their quantitative properties, is simply shorthand for talk of those items *qua* judged and known, that is, for conditions of knowledge. But if that is so, then the following well-known, key statement from the beginning of the *Transcendental Analytic*, which Kant appears to regard as substantial,

reduces to a tautology: 'The conditions of the **possibility of experience** [*Erfahrung*, identified by Kant with *empirisches Erkenntniß*, empirical cognition, B218] in general are at the same time conditions of the **possibility of the objects of experience**, and on this account have objective validity' (A158/B197). The notion of a condition of possibility, applied to objects, implies a transitive relation of making-possible, different in kind from the normative relations involved in knowledge, and underpinning them. It may also be pointed out that a reduction to epistemology, though it may be *suggested* by the Copernican formula, is not what it strictly *asserts*: to consider objects in relation to our mode of cognition is still to consider *objects*, not just their representations, and thus, arguably, to continue to treat of things *qua* their being. So it may be argued that there is as much reason to identify transcendental philosophy with a form of ontological enquiry distinguished by its use of the form of cognition as an ontological principle, as with a supplanting of ontology by epistemology.<sup>12</sup>

Following the historical trail leads to an interesting suggestion for developing the ontological view. The notion of a condition of possibility carries forward a form of philosophical explanation found in Kant's predecessors, belonging to the rationalist package elaborated out of Leibniz by above all Christian Wolff, and reemployed with amendments by later eighteenth-century German philosophers.<sup>13</sup> On this conception (compressing into one the views of several authors, and simplifying massively) all truths, for example those of geometry or natural science, imply the existence of entities beyond the objects of experience. These further entities—'Realitäten', in Wolff's terminology—are known through clear and distinct ideas or 'real definitions', *Realdefinitionen*, and provide the determining ground and essences of the entities given to us in experience. *Realitäten* themselves are not given in sense experience, their nature being purely intellectual, and their ontological home is in God's mind: they constitute as it were God's thoughts. They comprise the sphere of extra-logical possibility, for nothing is possible which is not composed out of them as the basic material of finite determinate being. Kant's recognition of the coherence

and appeal of this rationalist structure is testified by his detailed and precise restatement of it in the *Ideal of Pure Reason*, where it supplies the basis for his transcendental account of the Idea of God.

Now Kant of course rejects the notion that the *Realitäten* relevant to human knowledge are mind-independent, metaphysically real entities, but he does not reject the associated form of philosophical explanation: he agrees that the things that we are capable of knowing cannot derive their reality from themselves, and that something must give them reality and make them possible. This something, Kant maintains, is the form or act of cognition. Kant has therefore subjectivized the rationalist apparatus, by accepting that there are indeed *Realitäten* in the sense of things which play the metaphysical role of giving the object determinate existence, but identifying them with our power and activity of cognition: human cognition occupies the same position in relation to phenomena as the Transcendental Ideal does in relation to noumena. Cognition is thus not fundamentally a matter of 'being justified in making such and such a claim', but rather 'that by virtue or on account of which there come to be objects of such and such a kind'; and it is because cognition supplies a metaphysical ground, that the subject is able to make justified claims to knowledge of objects. Whereas the epistemological reading reduces conditions of possibility to non-metaphysical conditions for knowledge, the present reading treats knowledge, in the sense of the forms and activity of cognizing, as itself a metaphysical condition for the existence of the object as cognized.

It appears that, in seeking to correct the overly austere purely epistemological reading, we have brought the transcendental turn full circle back to metaphysics. Such a conclusion may strike us as forced and improbable. Certainly the notion that transcendental philosophy amounts to, as it were, 'metaphysics by epistemological means' is not lucid. But the challenge remains to explicate Kant's claim at A158/B197 concerning the parallelism or identity of the conditions of possibility of empirical knowledge and those of its objects. What has in any case been brought to our attention is the intricate interplay of epistemological and metaphysical/ontological factors in transcendental explanation, and the difficulty of understanding how it relates to the distinction between the order of

things and the order of knowledge: the relation of transcendental conditioning seems not to allow itself to be factorized in such terms.<sup>14</sup> If the transcendental turn is adequately characterized as an epistemological turn, then it is because cognition turns out to be not quite what we previously thought. The puzzle arising from transcendental philosophy's apparent fusion of epistemological and ontological grounds surfaces repeatedly throughout its history.

### **3. The Transcendental Standpoint**

The concept of 'standpoint' or 'point of view' recurs in transcendental discourse. It is employed at several points in formulating the doctrine of transcendental idealism: the 'human standpoint' to which all knowable objects are indexed is held to be defined by the spatio-temporality of our sensibility; and the standpoint from which nature is judged to be 'ideal' is that of transcendental reflection, while it is judged 'real' from the non-transcendental standpoint of natural consciousness.<sup>15</sup> And it appears again in the self-description of transcendental idealism, which presents itself as discontinuous with all earlier history of philosophy, the standpoint of which has been (tacitly, unconsciously) 'transcendental realist'.

It is not surprising, given the weight that it bears, that a number of perennial issues in transcendental philosophy should be bound up with the concept of a transcendental standpoint, and that it should have been central to one notable early attempt to state with greater exactness what distinguishes Kant's transcendentalism. Jakob Sigismund Beck, a contemporary of Kant's, edited a multi-volume set of extracts from his Critical writings, the third and concluding volume of which, published in 1796, he describes as 'presenting the only possible standpoint from which the Critical philosophy is to be judged'. The thought that drives Beck, and many later engagements with the transcendental turn, is that the various puzzles and opacities of Kantian philosophy, whereby it opens itself to criticism, are due to an inadequate appreciation of the 'interiority' of transcendental philosophy—a failure to hold fast to the defining self-conscious commitment of the transcendental



philosopher to exclude all realist-cum-dogmatic prejudice, and to consider matters in exclusively transcendental terms.

Without entering far into the details of his account, it is instructive, as an early anticipation of future transcendental developments and an index of the questions that it generates, to see how Beck develops the standpoint doctrine.<sup>16</sup> In the first *Critique*, Beck suggests, Kant is hampered in his exposition of his ideas by the need to lead the reader gradually up to the relevant standpoint, which involves the acquisition of new concepts, which is dependent in turn on an extra-discursive factor. This factor Beck identifies with the *activity* of the understanding 'through which it *originally* creates for itself the concept of an object and produces the "*I think an object*". This so-called '*original attribution*', the setting-up or instituting of the situation in which an object can be presented with a subject, Beck compares to the geometer's postulate 'Conceive of space!'. Everything depends, Beck emphasizes, on our getting ourselves *into* this activity, on our identification with a vantage point which, once occupied, generates its own framework, i.e. the panoply of Kantian concepts, just as the geometer who has conceived of space can then construct determinate figures:

I say that one can only have a full understanding of all these things [viz. central claims of the *Critique of Pure Reason*], and even of the discursive concept 'possibility of experience' itself, when one has fully mastered this standpoint. So long as one still thinks of this 'possibility of experience' purely discursively and does not follow the original attributive activity in just such an attribution as this, one has insight into virtually nothing, having merely substituted one incomprehensible thing for another.<sup>17</sup>

Whether or not Beck is right to depict understanding Kantian thought as a strictly all or nothing matter, and whether or not its aporiae truly disappear as soon as we occupy his standpoint, Beck is surely on the right path: some self-conscious rupture with ordinary thought is required, if

the transcendental turn is to reveal itself as a genuine meta-philosophical innovation, not just a constructive compromise between empiricism and rationalism which allows each to assume more sophisticated forms. Nothing less is implied by the idea that to take the transcendental turn is to embark upon a change of paradigm. A *prima facie* implication of this view worth noting is that 'transcendental arguments' cannot be singled out purely on the basis of their form and the characteristic topic of their premises; in other words, in order to *follow* such arguments or proofs, attention to more than the deductive structure of their discursive presentation is required.<sup>18</sup>

This alerts us to yet another set of issues, revolving around the question of whether the transcendental turn can vindicate itself conclusively. If a new set of rules is to govern philosophical enquiry, this raises in acute form the question of proof and justification. If the turn is not the result of a linear argument, to what extent can its claim to rational necessity avoid circularity? And if it involves the creation of a new form of intelligibility, as Beck for one seems to suggest, does it not then involve ultimately something akin to a Kuhnian gestalt switch?

A revolution is a historical change in which a new regime claims authority on a basis unacceptable to the old. Revolutions in philosophy are thus exposed to the charge of having simply deserted the old questions in place of answering them, of having changed the topic and merely *stipulated* what is and is not allowed to count as a cogent philosophical issue. Hence the charge levelled by Kant's contemporary opponents: the Copernican revolution demands its own dogmatic foundation, so Kant's own philosophy fails to be Critical. And arguably this combination of stipulation and circularity is brought out by Beck's attempt to clarify Kant's transcendentalism: unless we *already* know the truth of transcendental idealism (and hence have already understood it, *pace* Beck), how can we *know* that the standpoint of the 'original attribution' is truth-conducive and not illusory, a standpoint of mere fictional construction?

Transcendental thought represents itself as located on one side of a line, on the other side of which are ranged the various manifestations of transcendental realism. These include the conflicting dogmatic positions claiming knowledge of things in themselves, skeptical responses to these, and

the naive pre-philosophical standpoint which sponsors dogmatic metaphysics. The transcendental philosopher claims to be able to make sense of transcendental realism in a way that it cannot make sense of itself, releasing it from its conundrums, which is why, of the two standpoints, it is that of transcendental idealism which is to be preferred.

But even if it is true that transcendental idealism enjoys a consistency lacking transcendental realism—that is, even if there were (contrary to historical fact!) universal agreement among transcendental idealists concerning the implications of the doctrine, in contrast to the disagreements raging in the transcendental realist camp—it does not follow directly that transcendental idealism is the *right* standpoint. An impartial observer, undecided between transcendental idealism and transcendental realism, may reasonably hesitate, for it may be that transcendental idealism brings hostilities to end on false terms, cutting the Gordian knot instead of untying it in the way that reason requires.<sup>19</sup> Transcendental idealists may be justified in their *own* terms in believing that they are able to *see through* the confusions of transcendental realism, but the presuppositions of this diagnosis are ones that the transcendental realist is bound to reject; and since the realist 'analysand' cannot accept the interpretations of the idealist 'analyst', the therapy cannot work.

Suppose that, for the reasons just given, a clean supersession of transcendental realism is not forthcoming. What then suggests itself as a task for transcendental philosophy is a conciliatory project, a demonstration that the transcendental standpoint is able to recuperate some of the territory that it left behind in its initial moment of self-formation. *Rapprochement* may be sought either with the metaphysical tradition or with naturalism. The former belongs to the nineteenth century, while the latter is of course the option of our day. The leading idea for the former is that transcendental philosophy can re-engage with the old questions and the sphere of speculative metaphysics be recouped on transcendental grounds: 'background' transcendental conditions, it may be argued, have the same reach as the intuitions of reason to which early modern rationalism laid claim. In the case of proposed unifications with naturalism, the idea will be that transcendental conditions, as well as being discoverable *a priori*, can also be accessed in *a posteriori* form, allowing philosophical

reflection to join itself with the natural and human sciences. The most pressing question in this context is whether allowing transcendental conditions a double identity undermines the necessity which is an integral part of what gives them their philosophical interest in the first place.<sup>20</sup>

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The organization of the collection is straightforward: with one exception, the papers follow the historical time-line.

The first three, by Henry Allison, Karl Ameriks, and Paul Abela, deal with Kant. Allison focuses on Kant's concept of the transcendental and articulates a deflationary, non-metaphysical interpretation thereof, which provides the basis for an elucidation of the opposition of transcendental idealism and transcendental realism. Ameriks by contrast develops an ontological interpretation of Kant's idealism, which he characterizes as non-subjectivist and 'moderate', and which, Ameriks argues, addresses the concerns that lie behind the non-metaphysical reading. Abela, turning to practical reason, argues that if Kant's moral theory is interpreted, as it ought to be, as having its centre in the concept of the highest good, then the distance separating Kantian ethics from a naturalistic view of the moral life is narrowed considerably; framing the good life in transcendentalist terms does not, Abela argues, displace naturalistic categories.

Fichte is discussed by Daniel Breazeale, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, and Paul Guyer. Again the first two papers focus on the theoretical and the third on the practical. Breazeale opens with a consideration of how Kant leaves matters regarding the status and justification of transcendental claims, and proceeds to a study of the transcendental method that Fichte developed in his early *Wissenschaftslehre*, which is defined by its 'genetic', 'dialectical', and 'synthetic' dimensions, and involves the transcendental philosopher in acts of mental construction. Horstmann considers how Fichte attempts to defend on transcendental grounds the possibility of knowledge against skeptical objections: sharing the dissatisfaction of many of his contemporaries with Kant's achievement in

this regard, Fichte shifts, Horstmann argues, from a 'justification' strategy to a 'grounding' strategy, in which a special role is occupied by the theory of self-consciousness, and which Horstmann traces through to Fichte's 1801/02 *Wissenschaftslehre*. Guyer focuses on Fichte's attempt, in his 1798 *System of Ethics*, to improve on Kant's own attempt to ground moral philosophy within the transcendental framework. Three problems in particular are to the fore: the transcendental deduction of the fundamental principle of morality, the element of feeling in moral awareness, and the problem of freedom posed by the fact that human beings do not always act as morality demands.

Robert Pippin and Stephen Houlgate offer contrasting considerations of Hegel's relation to transcendentalism and thus of Hegel's project as a whole. Pippin, here attending to the notions of metaphysics and logic in Hegel, and to Hegel's view of the relation between the conceptual and the sensible, defends an interpretation of Hegel's idealism as a development of Kant's, but one which is neither 'merely' transcendental nor such as to entail a return to 'substantialist' pre-Critical metaphysics. Houlgate contests Charles Taylor's account of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as 'an essay in transcendental argument': in fact, according to Houlgate, Hegel criticizes the transcendental approach to natural consciousness on the grounds; and what is offered in the *Phenomenology* is not a philosophical theory of consciousness and its conditions, but a rigorously phenomenological study of what emerges *in* and *for* consciousness.

Nietzsche is discussed by Béatrice Han-Pile, who argues that the interpretations proposed in the literature of Nietzsche as either a transcendental philosopher or a naturalist are too simple, while the common proto-deconstructionist reading misconstrues Nietzsche's error theory. Rather, Han-Pile argues, Nietzsche efforts are directed at an overcoming of the opposition between transcendental philosophy and naturalism; though denying the possibility of genuine *a priori* knowledge, Nietzsche remains close to transcendental idealism.

The phenomenologists are discussed by Dan Zahavi, Steven Crowell, Taylor Carman, Cristina Lafont, and Sebastian Gardner. Zahavi focuses on Husserl's use of the term 'transcendental', methodology, and relation to Kant, arguing that Husserlian phenomenology certainly deserves to be

classified as a form of transcendental philosophy, though it operates with a conception of the transcendental that, owing to Husserl's intersubjective transformation of subjectivity, differs in important respects from the traditional one. Crowell, focusing on Husserl and Heidegger, argues all phenomenology to be transcendental, insofar as it makes *meaning* the primary topic of philosophy: rather than restricting transcendental inquiry to knowledge claims, phenomenology expands the scope of transcendental philosophy to all experience, investigating its normative structure; the subject's responsiveness to norms, Crowell argues, is revealed by phenomenology as the key to a transcendental account of meaning or intentionality. Carman examines the theme of truth in *Being and Time* and later writings of Heidegger's. Heidegger's account of truth as uncovering is intended, Carman argues, as a phenomenological characterization of the experiences and practices that warrant our deeming something true; and this conception of truth as ontologically foundational, a condition for the intelligibility of practical and theoretical attitudes, shows Heidegger to remain rooted in the tradition of transcendental philosophy. Lafont analyses conflicting tendencies in Heidegger's *Being and Time*: Heidegger aims to single out the essential structures of human existence in the ahistorical mode of transcendental philosophy, yet his hermeneutical phenomenology reveals our radical facticity, historicity and situatedness. The solution, Lafont argues, is to view hermeneutic phenomenology as a variety of transcendental philosophy: hermeneutic conditions of understanding are the ultimate transcendental conditions, which consequently forego their claim to universal validity. Gardner argues that Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception should be understood as belonging to transcendental philosophy, and as committed to transcendental idealism, for which reason it is not comparable to apparently similar theories in analytic philosophy of mind: Merleau-Ponty's interest in scientific psychology is subordinated, Gardner argues, to his strategy of revealing 'pre-objectivity' as a final transcendental condition.

Mulhall provides a critical examination of Bernard Williams' highly influential interpretation of Wittgenstein as a transcendental idealist, focusing on Wittgenstein's attitude to empirical science, conception of (grammatical) limits, and use of the first person plural;

misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's position and attitude in these contexts, Mulhall argues, underlies Williams' misconstrual. The concluding paper by Wayne Martin challenges the historical identification of transcendentalism with the Kantian legacy: traces of the transcendental strategy, Martin argues, can be found already among the ancients, in the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiosis*, a distinctive form of self-consciousness which, Martin shows, serves as a condition of the possibility of intentionally determinate perceptions and desires.

It is obvious, but all the same should be acknowledged, that the selection of historical figures who receive discussion in this volume is not beyond challenge and that the list of those who have been omitted but whose relation to the transcendental tradition is either clear or in need of elucidation— Schelling, Schopenhauer, Peirce, Bergson, Sartre, Levinas, Adorno, Foucault . . .—is long and distinguished. Their non-inclusion receives the familiar, non-transcendental explanation, that the space available in a single volume is limited.

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<sup>1</sup> The obvious way of making the case for a principled connection of transcendental philosophy with the practical is in terms of ends: if cognition can only be understood in terms of its ends—if transcendental grounding and justification has a teleological aspect—then the conditions are in place for a single system of theoretical and practical reason. The theory of self-consciousness or subjectivity is perhaps a further candidate for inclusion in the basic transcendental agenda.

<sup>2</sup> It is relevant that Kant's own use of 'transcendental' appears to vary: compare the stricter definitions in the first *Critique* at A56/B80 and A468/B676 with the more permissive definition in the Introduction to the third *Critique* at 5:181 and 20:209; on this issue, see Förster 1989, and Horstmann 1989, pp. 168ff.

<sup>3</sup> This collection confessedly reflects an anglophone philosophical orientation. The concept of the transcendental has figured little in mainstream analytic philosophy, and has not been especially prominent as a *historical* category in anglophone work on the post-Kantian tradition; from within other philosophical environments, the existence of a transcendental tradition may not be regarded as in need of demonstration.

<sup>4</sup> 'Types' refers here to purely formal object-specifying features, prescinding from non-philosophical distinctions of ontological kinds; 'us' refers to knowers specified again in a purely formal way.

<sup>5</sup> The argument just rehearsed is intended, note, only to exemplify the manner in which transcendental idealism allows itself to be argued for.

<sup>6</sup> The Antinomy of Pure Reason may also be regarded as arguing for transcendental idealism in this manner.

<sup>7</sup> This is the basis of Kant's retrieval of the term 'transcendental' from medieval philosophy: see Aertsen 1996, pp. 17–24.

<sup>8</sup> From another angle they may of course be regarded as different components of transcendental idealism.

<sup>9</sup> See in particular Kant's note in the Preface of *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, 4:474–476 (Kant 2004, pp. 10–12). Completion of the Transcendental Deduction is required for 'the

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question **how** the categories make such experience possible', 'the problem **how** experience is now possible by means of the categories', 'the explanation of **how** experience thereby becomes possible in the first place'. Without it, we could not avoid 'taking refuge in pre-established harmony'.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Guyer claims that Kant's arguments yield 'an epistemological model of the confirmation of beliefs', 'the basic framework for the justification of beliefs': Kantian conditions of possibility are 'principles which would have to be appealed to in the justification of empirical claims to knowledge', 'conditions for verifying or confirming empirical judgements' (Guyer 1987, pp. 258–259 and 304). In stating and defending his position, Guyer contrasts his reading of transcendental conditions with the view that they constitute psychological factors in the production of belief. Cf. Henry Allison's denial that Kant (in the Refutation of Idealism) is concerned with the 'conditions of the justification or verification' of knowledge claims (Allison 1983, p. 297).

<sup>11</sup> Cassirer 1923, pp. 427–428 (my translation).

<sup>12</sup> The 'ontologische Kantinterpretation' of German scholarship in the 1920s and 30s, associated with Max Wundt, Heinz Heimsoeth and Martin Heidegger, among others, set itself against the epistemological orientation of Neo-Kantianism. The considerations which it chiefly cites in its support concern the practical fulfilment of reason, the positive function of the Transcendental Dialectic, and Kant's late talk of a 'practico-dogmatic' metaphysics. But the case for an ontological reading can also be made—Heidegger does so—on grounds of the Aesthetic and Analytic of the first *Critique* alone. Heidegger refers to Kant's identification of ontology with transcendental philosophy in the late *What Real Progress?* text (20:260, 20:263, 20:281).

<sup>13</sup> Moses Mendelssohn provides a clear example in 'On Evidence in the Metaphysical Sciences' (1764): 'Of the properties of things outside us, we never know with convincing certainty whether they are realities [Realitäten] or mere appearances [Erscheinungen] and, at bottom, depend upon negations; indeed, in the case of some of them, we have reason to believe that they are mere appearances. Thus we can ascribe none of these properties [Eigenschaften] to the Supreme Being and must absolutely deny him some of them. Belonging to the latter group are all *qualitates*

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*sensibiles* that we have reason to believe are not to be found outside us as they seem to us thanks to our sensuous, limited knowledge and that, therefore, are not realities [Realitäten]. This inference can also be inverted. What does not belong to the Supreme Being cannot be a reality [Realität] since all possible realities [Realitäten] are his to the highest degree. From this it follows naturally that extension, movement and color are mere appearances and not realities [Realitäten]. For, were they realities [Realitäten], then they would have to be ascribed to the Supreme Being' (Mendelssohn 1997, p. 290). The concept goes back to Scotus, who recognizes the need for a type of distinction midway between real distinctions and conceptual distinctions, which he calls a formal distinction: what it distinguishes are not things (*res*) but 'formalities' or 'realities' (e.g. God's will and God's intellect).

<sup>14</sup> The passage from B293 quoted above illustrates the point. Kant tells us that the possibility of things as magnitudes can be exhibited (*kann dargelegt werden*) in (and only in) outer sense. How is the exhibitability relation to be parsed: is outer sense constitutive of existence as magnitude, or is it only the unique means of epistemic access to such existents? The puzzle is reflected in several long-running issues in Kant interpretation; for example, concerning how the distinction is to be drawn between space and the representation of space, and between appearances and representations.

<sup>15</sup> This notion receives a detailed exposition (and criticism) in Moore 1997.

<sup>16</sup> See Beck's letter to Kant, 17 June 1794, in Kant 1999, no. 630, 11:508–511, pp. 479–481.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 11:510, p. 480.

<sup>18</sup> See Sacks 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Here is one way the criticism might be developed, which goes back to the earlier point concerning transcendental philosophy's 'fusion' of epistemology and metaphysics. The transcendental philosopher declares that matters of ontology are to be approached by way of reflection on our representations and cognitive powers. Yet transcendental enquiry is not interested in representations to the *exclusion* of objects. Rather the intention is to re-determine objects *by way of* representations. This then raises the question: At what point, if any, are we entitled by

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transcendental lights to infer '*p*' from 'It is necessary that we represent *p*'? The transcendentalist answer, it would seem, can only be that we are *never* entitled to *absolutely* discharge the subjective-representational prefix, to dis-embed *p* and transfer necessity altogether to *what is thought* as distinct from the *thinking* of it. The transcendental realist accordingly rejoins: The task of philosophy is *defined* by the challenge to show that there *are* conditions under which inferences to fully extra-representational necessities are legitimate; if this is not broached, then the task has been abandoned. Moreover, the idealist's denial of the possibility of such an inference evinces dogmatism. The transcendental idealist appears captivated by a picture of 'being confined within representations', in the same way that Berkeley appears captivated by the thought that whatever he imagines occurs within an act of imagining. And this is confused: just as, in the Berkeley case, the act of imagining is not included within the *content* of what is imagined, so when I arrive through transcendental proof at the judgement 'There must be substance,' I am not making a judgement about my own acts and practices of conceptualization and inference; I am not, in that judgement, *resolving* to use a concept or *targeting* my own cognitive states. Cassirer's statement in the quotation above, 'the being of which we have in general systematic knowledge can be grasped by us only in *judgement*', also exemplifies the confusion: to be sure, judgement (and not being) is what figures in contexts of justification (we justify claims, not things), but the judgements *for* which justification is sought are precisely claims concerning what is taken to have *being* independent of the making of the judgement. Hence the paradox of Kant's empirical realism: ordinary claims about empirically real objects do not make reference to their own claim-making.

This sort of realist counter-blast is characteristic of Kant's contemporary critic F. H. Jacobi. For a sophisticated recent realist critique of transcendentalism, roughly along these lines, see Moore 1997, esp. Ch. 6, and Moore 2012, Ch. 5.

<sup>20</sup> See especially Sacks 2003, Ch. 6. Other writings relevant to the question of what constitutes and defines the transcendental turn include Hartmann 1966, Krings 1984, Carr 1999, and Bell 2001.