Necessity, Existence and Transcendental Idealism

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Introduction

The role of transcendental idealism in Kant's theory of knowledge has been both deliberately underrated[1] and inadvertently exaggerated. If conceivably not necessary, its role in Kant's explanation of the possibility of a priori knowledge in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is at least pivotal to the success of the explanation.[2] On the other hand, though transcendental idealism depends on Kant's epistemological criterion of an existing object, or, simply, his criterion of existence, the criterion for its part is actually independent of the idealism.[3] In fact, it may be because this independence has hardly been recognized that commentators have been unaware of the role the criterion may actually be playing in the continuing controversy over the correct interpretation of the idealism. Altogether, this article addresses both shortcomings – the underestimation and the exaggeration of the role of the idealism in Kant's epistemology. While it places the idealism at the centre of the epistemology, it also separates the criterion of existence from the idealism. In highlighting this contrast, the article explains how the criterion may actually be contributing to the persistence of the ongoing dispute over the correct interpretation of the idealism.

The article is divided into two parts. First, it accords transcendental idealism a central role in its account of the necessity attaching to the propositions of geometry in particular, taking geometry as a central case of a priori knowledge for Kant, other cases of such knowledge being left for a separate discussion. It then turns its attention to Kant's criterion of existence and it finds that it is independent of the idealism. Finally, the two parts of the article are connected in the conclusion. The connection is that the criterion

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of the existence of the objects that the first part of the article claims to underlie the necessary propositions of geometry (whose necessity is said to depend on the reference of geometry to appearances alone) is the same criterion of existence that the second part of the article argues should be viewed as being independent of the idealism. That is precisely why the criterion can underlie Kant's account of the necessity of geometry.

1. Necessity and Transcendental Idealism

1.1 James Van Cleve in his book on Kant's first *Critique* credits Russell with having delivered the *coup de grâce* to Kant's attempt to explain our attribution of necessity to certain of our propositions about objects.[4] For example, Kant's theory is supposed to explain the necessity that 'we can only apprehend cubes as being eight-cornered',[5] or that '2 + 2 = 4'.[6] The explanation consists in his so-called Copernican revolution in philosophy. It is our 'cognitive constitution',[7] specifically, our form of intuition, that explains our use of necessity in our talk about our apprehension of the number of corners of a cube or in our attribution of necessity to our addition of 2 plus 2 being equal to 4. But Russell points out that since our nature might have been different, and hence, Van Cleve continues, since 'it is contingent we have the constitution we do . . . [then] if our constitution had been different, [the laws of arithmetic and geometry] would have been false, and other laws would have held their place'.[8]

Van Cleve's formulation of Russell's argument consists first of a premise that claims that the necessity of any given proposition is explained by the fact that the proposition is 'a deliverance of our form of intuition'.[9] Van Cleve calls this the Dependency Premise, and using the square '□' for necessity, the diamond '◇' for possibility, the single-line arrow '→' for material implication, the double-line arrow '⇒' for strict implication, or entailment, and 'Fp' for 'a proposition p is a deliverance of a form of intuition,' he symbolizes this first premise of Russell's argument as follows:

1. $(p)(\Box p \rightarrow [\Box p \Rightarrow Fp])$

Since it is contingent that 'any given proposition *is* delivered by our form of intuition', it is 'possibly false' that it is delivered by our

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form of intuition; thus we get the second premise of Russell's argument:[10]

2. (p) $\Diamond \sim Fp$

Van Cleve calls this the Contingency Premise. Moreover, if we let p be any necessary truth, we get the third premise:

3. $\Box p$

And from 3 and 1 we get the fourth proposition of the argument:

4. $\Box p \Rightarrow Fp$

In addition, a theorem in modal logic holds that if two propositions are related by entailment, and the entailed proposition is possibly false, so is the proposition that entails it. So, from 2 and 4 we get:

5. $\Diamond \sim \Box p$

That is, it is possibly false that p is a necessary truth. Hence, under different conditions from those that actually exist the laws of arithmetic and geometry would be false. But this is equivalent to proposition 6 of the argument:

6. $\sim \Box \Box p$

That is, it is false that p is necessarily necessary. Hence, under different conditions from those that actually exist, viz., if our form of intuition were different from what it actually is, the laws of arithmetic and geometry would be false.

Van Cleve acknowledges that the defender of Kant can accept this conclusion, since it allows p to be necessary; it only rules out that it *must* be necessary: it would be merely 'contingently necessary', Van Cleve says.[11] He cites Nicholas Rescher as having mounted such a defence.[12]

Although Van Cleve considers the conclusion about the contingency of the laws of arithmetic and geometry 'absurd', as attested by an axiom of the modal system S4 that Van Cleve accepts, viz., $\Box p \rightarrow \Box \Box p$, he nonetheless goes after the Kantian who would exclude the axiom. He does so by strengthening the argument he has just given. Now the mere truth of a proposition instead of its necessity is what is supposed to depend on our form of intuition. He reasons that if a proposition owes its necessity to our cognitive

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constitution, so should its truth. The strengthened argument would thus be immune to the Kantian defence that Kant needs only a contingent necessity instead of a necessary necessity. The strengthened argument is rather concerned with the truth of p, not its necessity, and hence it can disregard the issue of whether the necessity in question is itself contingent or necessary. The strengthened argument involving only the truth of p goes as follows:

1. $(p)(\Box p \rightarrow [p \Rightarrow Fp])$ (Strengthened Dependency Premise)
2. $(p) \Diamond \sim Fp$ (Contingency Premise)
3. $\Box p$ (assumption for reductio)
4. $p \Rightarrow Fp$ (from 3 and 1)
5. $\Diamond \sim p$ (from 4, 2, and the same modal principle as before)
6. $\sim \Box p$ (from 5)[13]

The strengthened argument thus demonstrates that if our cognitive constitution were a logically necessary condition of the truth of p, as it ought to be if it were a logically necessary condition of the necessity of p, the assumption that p is necessary would lead to the absurd conclusion that it is not necessary. So Russell is vindicated after all: 'If our nature changed drastically enough, we could wake up tomorrow and find that cubes have nine corners or that $2 + 2 = 5$.'[14]

1.2 Van Cleve's strengthened argument is surely sound. As an interpretation of part of Kant's theory of our attribution of necessity to propositions of arithmetic and geometry, it cannot be denied. It seems to me, however, the part of Kant's theory to which it actually pertains consists in Kant's *disavowal* of any such attributions of necessity to the propositions in question. Kant surely could have reasoned things through as soundly as Russell and Van Cleve have reasoned them and therefore could have come to the same conclusion that they have reached. So we might ask what reasoning Kant could have gone through for him to think that his Copernican revolution in philosophy succeeded in explaining our attribution of necessity to the propositions of arithmetic and geometry, as well as to those belonging to what he calls the general doctrine of motion.

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The modification of Van Cleve's strengthened argument I am about to offer emanates from a single change in his argument. I am going to substitute the relation of presupposition for that of entailment as the logical relation between a given proposition p and the ascription of the factor F to the proposition. By the term 'presupposition' I will be adopting Strawson's use of the term.[15] According to that use, one proposition presupposes another if and only if the truth of the latter is a logically necessary condition of *either* the truth or falsehood of the former; that is, it is a logically necessary condition of the first proposition's having a truth-value at all. This is to be contrasted with entailment, where the falsehood of an entailed proposition results simply in the falsehood of the proposition that entails it. I will symbolize the relation of presupposition by the triple-line arrow '$\Rightarrow$'. The modified first premise now reads, that for any given proposition p, if p is necessary then p presupposes that p is a deliverance of our form of intuition.

1.* $(p)(\Box p \varnothing [p \Rightarrow Fp])$

Next, we add Van Cleve's Contingency Premise

2. $(p) \Diamond \sim Fp$

And, following Van Cleve, assume for a reductio

3. $\Box p$

Hence, from 3 and 1* ,

4.* $p \Rightarrow Fp$ (from 3 and 1*)

But now, instead of the modal theorem to the effect that if two propositions are related by entailment and the entailed proposition is possibly false so is the proposition that entails it, we get a modification of the theorem based on the notion of presupposition. It holds that if two propositions are related by presupposition and the presupposed proposition is possibly false, the presupposing proposition is possibly neither true nor false. If we symbolize a proposition's being either true or false as TVp, we get from 4*, 2, and the presuppositional modification of the modal principle

5.* $\Diamond \sim TVp$

Thus we get the proposition that p is possibly neither true nor false. This is to be contrasted with the penultimate conclusion of

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Van Cleve's strengthened argument (viz., proposition 5) that p is possibly false, which in turn entailed the conclusion that (necessarily p) is false. And from 5* we get

6.* $\Diamond \sim TV\Box p$

That is, we get the conclusion that (necessarily p) is possibly neither true nor false. Since 6* does not contradict 3 (as Van Cleve's 6 contradicts 3), Van Cleve's reductio does not go through.

This completes the defence of Kant against Van Cleve's strengthened argument, which was supposed to vindicate Russell's criticism of Kant. As such, however, the defence is only a negative argument in support of Kant. A positive argument on Kant's behalf will be provided in the section after the next one.

1.3 The difference between entailment and presupposition yields two different concepts of objects. The objects appearing as subject terms of the propositions that *entail* that the propositions are deliverances of our form of intuition are objects that are logically and causally independent of that form. The objects of a given arithmetic or geometric proposition in Van Cleve's strengthened argument have to be logically and causally independent of our form of intuition, if it is to be possibly false that the proposition *is* delivered by our form of intuition. Any given proposition referring to such an object could have a truth-value even if the proposition were not delivered by our form of intuition, since it would refer to such an object independently of our form of intuition. That is why the proposition could be possibly false instead of being possibly without a truth-value. In a word, Van Cleve's use of entailment takes the object of the proposition *realistically*.

Exactly the opposite holds in the case of presupposition. Now the object that p refers to *would* depend on our form of intuition. It can be shown, however, that for Kant it would depend on the form only if we were to intuit an object of the first sort, viz., an object that is logically and causally independent of the form.[16] If the object that we would thus have to intuit were not logically and causally independent of the form, our intuition of the object would cease to be a condition of the other object's dependence on the form. Moreover, if we were not to intuit a logically and causally independent object, the dependent object would not exist. Even

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though a reference to such a dependent object would be possible, it would not 'take place', as Kant puts it (A19/B33, A33/B49). The possibility consists in the reference, but in this instance it would be a reference without any existing object being referred to. Consequently, as determined by the nature of presupposition, any given proposition belonging to arithmetic or geometry would not have a truth-value. In sum, in contrast to Van Cleve's use of entailment, my use of presupposition takes the objects of the propositions in question *idealistically*: they are Kant's *appearances*.

The difference I am pointing out between Van Cleve's use of entailment and my use of presupposition and the resulting difference in different concepts of objects are the reasons I said earlier that Van Cleve's strengthened argument is surely sound as an interpretation of *part* of Kant's theory of the necessity of the propositions of arithmetic and geometry. The part in question is Kant's consideration of the reference of such propositions to objects that are independent of our form of intuition. Russell and Van Cleve are right: our form of intuition cannot explain any legitimate attribution of necessity to such propositions that refer to such independent objects.

However, this is the part of Kant's theory in which he *disavows* such attribution. As I have already noted, he could have reasoned through to the same conclusion reached by Russell and Van Cleve as surely as they could reason through to it. That is why, I submit, he took his Copernican revolution in philosophy to entail his transcendental idealism. It is only appearances, and not objects, that are logically and causally independent of our form of intuition, and are the objects of the necessary truths of arithmetic and geometry.

1.4 There remains the derivation of a necessity from a contingency that was promised in section 1.2 above.[17] However, before I proceed with the derivation, I must limit the claim of the argument, as I indicated I would at the beginning of the article. The connection for Kant between the truths of arithmetic, and, for that matter, the truths of the general doctrine of motion, on the one hand, and time, on the other, is a complicated matter. It is much less straightforward than the connection for Kant between the truths of Euclidean geometry and Euclidean space of which I am about to speak, and as such it clearly goes beyond the scope of this article.

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The same limitation must apply to the necessary truths Kant claims to find among the principles of synthetic judgments. So, I am going to limit the rest of my argument to the connection I take Kant to find between the necessity we ascribe to the truths of Euclidean geometry and Euclidean space.

I have just distinguished appearances from objects that are independent of our form of intuition on the ground that the ascription of our form of intuition to the former *presupposes* that we intuit objects that are logically and causally independent of our intuition of them, and hence are logically and causally independent of our form of intuition. Our ascription of our form of intuition to these logically and causally independent objects, on the other hand, instead *entails* that we intuit them. We thus begin the argument with the use of presupposition : (1) our ascription of Euclidean-spatial properties to outer appearances presupposes the contingent proposition that we intuit as 'outside us' objects that are logically and causally independent of our intuitions of them (A22/B37). That is, (2) if our ascription of Euclidean-spatial properties to outer appearances has a truth-value, we in fact intuit these independent objects as outside us. Furthermore, (3) it is a conceptual truth for Kant that if we intuit these independent objects as outside us, we do so through our form of outer intuition. Moreover, (4) our form of outer intuition, again as a matter of contingent fact, is Euclidean-spatial in nature. It is therefore a contingent fact that (5) if we intuit these independent objects as outside us, we do so through our Euclidean-spatial form of outer intuition. Therefore, (6) if we intuit these independent objects as outside us, the objects of our intuitions – outer appearances of these independent objects – have Euclidean-spatial properties. Since (2) our ascription of Euclidean-spatial properties to outer appearances has a truth-value only if we intuit these independent objects as outside us, (7) our ascription of Euclidean-spatial properties to outer appearances has a truth-value only if the truth-value is truth. Therefore, (8) the ascription could not be false, since it could be false only if we did not intuit these independent objects as outside us, but in that case the ascription would not have a truth-value to begin with. Obviously, the ascription could not both be false and have no truth-value. Consequently, (9) if the ascription has a truth-value, the truth-value could not possibly be false, and hence would be necessarily true.[18]

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The application to the truths of Euclidean geometry of the result of the argument given so far is as follows. (10) The ascription of Euclidean space to outer appearances could not be the necessary truth I have just argued it must be, if the ascription of the properties of that space, and hence the geometry of that space, that is, Euclidean geometry, to outer appearances were not also necessary. Finally, therefore, (11) if the ascription of Euclidean space to outer appearances has a truth-value, the propositions of geometry are necessary truths.

The argument in support of Kant's theory of the necessity of the propositions of geometry can be symbolized. The numbered symbols in the following argument correspond to the parenthetically numbered propositions of the argument that has just been given.

Let S stand for the proposition that outer appearances are Euclidean-spatial,
let S_1 stand for the contingent proposition that we intuit objects that are logically and causally independent of our intuition as outside us (A22/B37),
let S_2 stand for the conceptual truth for Kant that we intuit objects only through our form of intuition
let S_3 stand for the contingent proposition that our form of outer intuition is Euclidean-spatial,
let S_4 stand for the contingent proposition that we intuit independent objects as outside through our Euclidean-spatial form,
let G stand for the propositions of Euclidean geometry.

Again let the single-line arrow, '$\rightarrow$', stand for material implication, let the double-line arrow, '$\Rightarrow$', stand for entailment, let the triple-line arrow, '$\Rightarrow$' stand for presupposition, and let 'TV' stand for having a truth-value.

1. $S \Rightarrow S_1$ (A19/B33, A33/B49, and A22/B37) (that is, S presupposes that we intuit independent objects and we intuit them as outside us)
2. $TV_S \Rightarrow S_1$ (from 1 and the meaning of 'presupposition')
3. $S_1 \Rightarrow S_2$ (a conceptual truth for Kant)
4. S_3 (a contingent fact about our outer intuition, that it is Euclidean- spatial)

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5. $S_1 \rightarrow S_4$ (from 3 and 4)
6. $S_1 \rightarrow S$ (from 1, 5, and Kant's theory that if we intuit independent objects, the objects of our intuitions [that is, appearances] have the form of the intuitions of which they are appearances)
7. $TV_S \rightarrow S$ (from 2 and 6)
8. $TV_S \rightarrow \sim\Diamond \sim S$ (from 7 by contraposition and the impossibility of both $\sim TV_S$ and $\sim S$)
9. $TV_S \ \Box S$(from 8)
10. $\Box_S \Rightarrow \Box G$ (Euclidean geometry is the geometry of Euclidean space; therefore, the necessary ascription of the latter to appearances entails the necessary ascription to appearances of the properties determined by the former)
11. $TV_S \rightarrow \Box G$ (from 9 and 10)

1.5 This completes the derivation of necessary truths from contingent truths plus the logical relation of presupposition. The success of the proof depends on drawing the distinction between entailment and presupposition, and thus depends on drawing the distinction between independent objects and appearances as the respective objects of the two types of ascription of spatial and/or temporal properties: one where the ascription entails that we intuit independent objects, and the other where the ascription presupposes such intuition. It thus depends on drawing the implication of Kant's transcendental idealism from his Copernican revolution in philosophy.[19]

2. Existence and Transcendental Idealism

2.1 We now turn our attention to the inadvertently exaggerated influence accorded transcendental idealism on Kant's theory of knowledge. It is often asked whether the idealism is committed to two types of object – appearance and thing in itself[20] – or just one type, say, the empirical object, with the proviso that each object has two aspects – appearance and thing in itself?[21] Alternatively, the

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question is asked: Is Kant committed to two types of reality – empirical reality and transcendental reality – or just one type, say, empirical reality, that is considered under two aspects – again, appearance and thing in itself? Whatever the answer, it would seem to affect one's view of a similar question about Kant's epistemological criterion of an *existing* object, or, simply, his criterion of *existence*: those favouring a dual-object interpretation of his idealism might be expected to maintain that Kant adopts dual criteria for two types of existence, whereas those who interpret the idealism as single-object (dual-aspect) might be inclined to say that Kant adopts a single criterion of existence – the existence of the very objects to which the idealism is committed.

So long as Kant's criterion (criteria) of existence is (are) tied to his idealism in this manner, it is hard to see how it (they) might help resolve the controversy over whether Kant had a dual-object or a dual-aspect theory of reality. The dispute might not seem so intractable, however, if we found that Kant in fact has a unique epistemological criterion of existence that is actually independent of his idealism. Since his category of existence is independent of the category of reality, we might expect that his criterion of existence would be similarly independent of his concept of a real object. The relation between the criterion and the correct interpretation of transcendental idealism might then be seen as the reverse of what might commonly be imagined. Instead of thinking that an interpretation of the idealism might affect an understanding of the criterion of existence, one might conjecture that the criterion affects one's interpretation of the idealism in some way. The criterion might then throw light on the controversy about the idealism. This part of the article is the search for such a criterion, and it indeed concludes with a suggestion for using the criterion of existence that is found, not to resolve the dispute about Kant's dualism, but rather to help explain its pesky endurance.

2.2 In several passages in the second (B) edition of the *Critique* Kant talks about the strange faculty of knowledge belonging to a 'primordial', or 'original' ('*ursprünglich*'), or a 'divine' ('*göttlichen*') being.[22] Though this cognitive power is unfamiliar to us, he still uses it in his attempt to put the limitations of our own faculties of knowledge into perspective (B72, B135, B138–9, B145).

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The objects of a divine self-consciousness are said by Kant to exist through the self-consciousness itself (B139). This is hard for us to understand since, being familiar only with our own kind of self-consciousness, we think of the existence of its objects – indeed, the existence of any objects – as independent of any self-consciousness. So it cannot be because it is a self-consciousness that a divine self-consciousness is said to have the peculiar property that through itself its objects at the same time exist. Rather, it must be because a divine self-consciousness has a property that a self-consciousness in general does not have. Evidently aware of this, Kant explains that a divine self-consciousness has the unique property that through itself a 'manifold' is given (B135, B138). He further stipulates that this would be a 'manifold of intuition' (B138). Again, however, this is hard for us to understand, since being familiar only with our own kind of manifold of intuition – the sensible kind – we think of the existence of objects as independent of any manifold of intuition. So it cannot be because a manifold of intuition is given that a divine self-consciousness has the peculiar property that through itself its objects at the same time exist. Rather it must be because a manifold of an intuition corresponding to a divine self-consciousness – a manifold of an *original* intuition – has a property that a manifold of intuition in general does not have.

We are supposed to conclude that whereas neither a self-consciousness nor a given manifold of intuition separately entails the existence of an object, they can do so together. But even this stipulation is hard for us to understand, since we are familiar with a *combination* of intuition and self-consciousness in mathematics that does not entail the existence of an object (B137–8, B147). We therefore think of the existence of objects as independent of a combination of a given manifold of intuition and a self-consciousness. So it cannot be because of a combination of a given manifold of intuition and a self-consciousness that a divine self-consciousness has the peculiar property that through itself its objects at the same time exist. In fact, that purported explanation is incoherent, since a combination of a given manifold of intuition and a self-consciousness is an action that can involve only a given manifold of intuition and a self-consciousness that are precisely *not* original or divine, respectively. Rather, the explanation we are looking for must lie in a relation between a manifold of an original intuition

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and a divine self-consciousness that a combination of a manifold of a human intuition and a self-consciousness such as ours does *not* have.

Those familiar with Kant's stipulations on this score may immediately suggest that the relation in question is logical equivalence: Necessarily, a divine self-consciousness is intuitive and conversely, necessarily, an original intuition is self-conscious (that is, intellectual). So, where is the problem? it may be asked.

The problem is that the answer is no clearer than the question. We are investigating the cognitive power of a divine being in order to find a criterion of an existing object in general. We will hardly find what we are looking for so long as we try to plumb the depths of a logical relation of equivalence between two terms that for all we know ought to be logically independent of each other. Indeed, the method of explanation I have adopted in this article is the ordinary one of looking for a generalization in given particulars. In this case, the particulars include both divine and human cognitive powers. If a generalization can be found, it might then be used to go back to a divine cognitive power to now understand it as an instance of the generalization. So, we would only be going backwards if we were to continue our investigation by trying to understand the notion of an intuitive self-consciousness or a self-conscious intuition in terms that were true of it alone and not of human cognitive powers as well.

2.3 The self-conscious character of an original intuition does have one advantage for our investigation, however. Since it makes a divine self-consciousness and an original intuition equivalent, it allows us to proceed with our inquiry by considering a second edition passage that is framed in terms of intuition independently of self-consciousness. Understandably, this passage belongs to the Aesthetic. Like the first passage from the B-Deduction that we considered, but expressed a little differently, it stipulates that the original intuition 'can of itself give the existence of its object' (B72). The passage from the B-Deduction that we should recall in this connection stated somewhat differently that through divine self-consciousness 'the objects of [the self-consciousness] should at the same time exist' (B139).

If not the terms themselves of our previous arguments, the same

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form of the arguments can get us started. It is hard for us to understand Kant's stipulation of an original intuition as one that 'can of itself give ... the existence of its object', since being familiar only with our own kind of intuition, that is, sensible intuition, we think of intuition as *dependent* on the existence of its object (B72).[23] So, it cannot be because it is an intuition that an original intuition is said to have the peculiar property that it 'can of itself give ... the existence of its object'.

Now, however, our argument can depart from the old form and take on a new one. If we remove the unique property belonging to an original intuition, viz., that '*of itself*' the intuition can give the existence of its object, we can abstract a property that is *common* to original and human intuition. This would be the property that through intuition in general the existence of its object is given. This property, however, creates a problem. An existing object is an object of a sensible intuition only if the existence is already involved in its being given; that is what the dependence on the existence amounts to. To put the point another way, a sensible intuition does not even have an existing object unless an existing object plays a part in its being given to the subject(s). For example, our outer intuition, which is spatial, has no existing object: 'we can quite well think of [space] as empty of objects' (A24/B38–9).

Let us therefore qualify this property of an intuition in general. Let us say that an intuition in general, whether of itself or depending on the existence of an object, can give the existence of the object. And we shall mean by the dependence that the existence plays a necessary part in its being given. To be specific about the dependence in the case of human intuition, it depends on the existence of an object that affects the faculty of representation (B 72). This stipulation will at the same time answer another question that is raised by the property. This is the question of which existing object among all existing objects is the object whose existence is being given. The answer is that it will be none other than the object whose existence the intuition in fact depends on – the existence that in fact plays the necessary part in an object's existence being given. For us humans, this means that it will be the particular object that in fact affects our faculty of representation. This determination of a particular object indicates a necessary further qualification of the property in question. It will now be the property of an intuition in general, whether of itself or depending on

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the existence of the object whose existence it in fact depends on, that it can give the existence of its object.

On the basis of this property of an intuition in general as finally formulated, we can state the criterion of existence: *All and only objects that can be given through intuition exist.* The difference between our sensible intuition and an original, intellectual intuition is that a sensible intuition depends on the existence of the object if the existence is to be given to the subjects, whereas an original intuition does not have that dependence; rather, it is through the intuition 'of itself' that the object's existence is given.

2.4 Before testing the criterion for adequacy, the difference between original or intellectual and human or sensible intuition can make transcendental idealism especially compelling. *Let an intuition be such a representation that its determination belongs to an object if and only if the object is given through the intuition.* More specifically, if the object exists, the existence of the object would be given through the intuition. For example, the form, or determination, of an outer empirical intuition, space, belongs to the corresponding appearance if and only if the existence of the appearance is given to us through the intuition.

It follows from the stipulation on intuition just given that *a determination, or form, of an intuition that depends on the existence of its object for the existence to be given cannot belong to the object.* For, if it did, there could be no such dependence, since the existence of the object would *already* be given through the intuition. A determination that belongs to an object cannot also belong to an intuition that depends on the existence of the object for the existence to be given through the intuition; that would have the determination depend on itself, which is absurd.[24]

In case the intuition is not thus dependent on the existence of the object for the existence to be given, the determination in question would belong to the *object in itself.* That is precisely the nature of an original intuition. But, because human intuition depends on the existence of its object for the existence to be given, the determination of the intuition, for example, space or time, cannot belong to the object in question – it can belong only to an *appearance* of the object. To do so, however, the dependence must be effective. And it is effective if and only if the intuition contains '[t]he effect of [the]

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object on the faculty of representation', namely, *sensation* (A19–20/B33–4). That makes the intuition *empirical*. Consequently, the object of an empirical intuition is only an appearance of the object on whose existence the intuition depends for the existence of the object to be given to us through the intuition.

2.5 Now we can test for the adequacy of the criterion against several major concepts from the *Critique*.

First, the criterion can dispel the air of mystery surrounding Kant's idea of an original or a divine cognitive power through whose representation the object of the representation at the same time exists.[25] Such an object is called by Kant a noumenon in the positive sense. If we do not find the criterion mysterious, we should not find the idea mysterious, either, since a noumenon satisfies the criterion.

An object of our understanding that *cannot* be said to exist would be an object of our thought alone – a *thing in itself* – what Kant calls a noumenon in the negative sense, since 'it is *not an object of our sensible intuition*' (B307). It extends beyond appearances '*problematically*' and consequently cannot be the object of our *assertion* (A255/B310). Since the category that rests on the judgement-function of assertion is existence, a noumenon in the negative sense cannot be said to exist. This fits our criterion of existence, since it is based precisely on the absence of a possible intuition of the object.

It might be thought that a counter-example to the criterion could be found in the manifold of our a priori sensible intuition, such as that of space or time. The manifold can be given through our intuition, and yet it cannot be said to exist. The reply is that the manifold is not an object and the criterion is about objects. The same manifold could constitute an object only through a self-consciousness, since the object would be a combination or, more generally, a synthesis, of the understanding. It could thus belong to mathematics. As already noted, however, mathematical objects cannot be said to exist. Existing objects that have arithmetic forms can be given only through *empirical* intuition (B15). And the same is true for existing objects that have geometric forms (B156). This distinguishes them from the a priori objects of mathematics. As combinations of the understanding, the latter are 'brought about'

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(B138)[26] through a synthesis of the understanding and therefore cannot be said to exist.

Remarks in the same vein can be made about certain other objects that are the results of synthesis. Empty space and time cannot be thought to exist 'without absurdities', Kant claims (B71). Yet empty space (and presumably empty time) can simply be thought (A24/B39). In a well-known footnote to the B-Deduction Kant claims that space, 'represented as *object*, (as we are required to do in geometry) . . . contains *combination* of the manifold' (B160a). As such it is a '*formal intuition*' and is empty. The same point is made about time. The note concludes that space and time are 'first *given* as intuitions' through 'a synthesis'. Consequently, it is space and time as (empty) objects 'first' given through a *synthesis*, not intuition, that cannot exist, which is precisely what our criterion would imply.

Objects of our a priori sensible intuition as determined by a *synthesis* of our a priori, or productive imagination can be said to exist, but only upon further qualification. We have already seen that for the existence of objects of sensible intuition in general to be given the existence itself must be involved. We will deal with this dependence, and thus the existing objects of a priori intuition, that is, appearances, at the end of this section.

Even as a *form*, or a *determination*, given through a priori *intuition*, space or time cannot exist, for if it did, it would make no sense to say that the intuition depended on the existence of its object for the existence to be given through the intuition; yet that locution has to make sense, since the intuition is sensible.

Objects of what we ordinarily call imagination and Kant calls reproductive imagination are also the result of *synthesis – empirical synthesis*. They, too, cannot be said to exist. Their synthesis consists of an individual's mere associations, which are 'entirely subject to empirical [psychological] laws . . . of association' (B152).

A distinctive *empirical synthesis* of 'the manifold in an empirical intuition' is necessary for objects of perception (B 160). On pain of overpopulating the world of existing objects, objects of perception cannot be counted among existing objects in addition to the objects of the empirical intuitions involved. The same objection holds for objects of experience, which itself is a *synthesis* of perceptions. There is also the objection that it is impossible to find any intuitions of the objects of perception or experience. On pain

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of an infinite regress, empirical intuitions would have to be preempted by appearances, and, as already noted, a priori intuitions cannot 'of themselves' give the existence of their objects. Since those are our only kinds of intuition, we would have to confer existence on objects we could not intuit, which would be illegitimate.[27]

Finally, of course, there is the 'undetermined object of an empirical intuition' – an appearance. Such an intuition contains sensation, which is the effect of the dependence of human intuition on the existence of its object that we have already discussed (A19–20/B33–4). Since an appearance can be given through intuition and can be said to exist – indeed, its existence is the existence that the existence of any other object of our knowledge must refer to – it, too, tends to confirm our criterion.

2.6 The underlying criterion of existence we seem to have found in the Aesthetic and the Logic of the *Critique* is, like Quine's quantificational criterion of existence (to be is to be a value of a bound variable),[28] non-committal about the kind of object that can be said to exist. The difference between Quine's criterion and Kant's is that Quine's is derived from predicate logic and thus the logic of *general* terms, whereas Kant's is derived from an analysis of our intuitional basis for *singular* terms, the very terms Quine's criterion was supposed to help eliminate. So, neither the idea of concept (Quine) nor that of intuition (Kant) determines the kind of object that can satisfy their respective criteria of existence. That commitment is left to a specific theory to determine.

This neutrality of Kant's criterion may ironically have helped spawn the mutually incompatible interpretations of his concept of a real object and thus of his transcendental idealism – a controversy that has enjoyed such a vexatious endurance. On the one hand, the uniqueness of the criterion may suggest that only a single set of conditions can determine the specific objects that can satisfy the criterion. For example, it may be argued that the conditions of a possible experience determine that only empirical objects can satisfy the criterion. Consequently, these would be the only objects covered by transcendental idealism, which attributes dual-aspects to them. On the other hand, the generality of the same unitary set of conditions stipulated by the criterion may suggest just the opposite – that one criterion can be employed for determining the

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ontological commitments of *any* particular theory that claims to be true. This is the use to which Quine put his criterion of existence. Since transcendental idealism posits two kinds of object – appearance and thing in itself – corresponding to two kinds of knowledge, human and divine, the criterion can be used to argue that Kant's dualism posits two kinds of reality.

If such speculation is plausible, our criterion of existence might at least partially explain the discouraging longevity of a dispute that has no end in sight.

Conclusion

In the first part of this article I argued that Kant's transcendental idealism is pivotal, if not actually necessary, to his theory of the possibility of a priori knowledge. In support of this thesis, I have shown how the idealism defends Kant from the objections of Russell and Van Cleve. They argue that the contingency that our mind is constituted in the way that it is makes it impossible for the truths of mathematics to be necessary, according to Kant's theory that our cognitive constitution explains the possibility of the necessity. The contingency of the actual constitution of our mind destroys any necessity that is supposed to depend on that constitution. Hence, Kant cannot explain the necessity of mathematics in terms of our cognitive constitution.

Transcendental idealism has been essential to my defence of Kant. I argued that the logical relation of a proposition of geometry (and mathematics generally) to the ascription of a form of our intuition to the proposition is presupposition, not entailment, the relation employed by Van Cleve. My analysis was intended to show that, whereas presupposition makes the objects of geometry appearances, entailment makes them things in themselves. Since Kant's theory of the necessity of geometric truths requires that the objects are appearances and not things in themselves, my use of presupposition accords transcendental idealism the central role that Kant gives it in his explanation of the necessity.

In the second part of the article I took the opposite tack and argued that the criterion of existence belonging to Kant's theory of knowledge is independent of his transcendental idealism. The criterion determines that objects can be said to exist just in case

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they can be given through intuition. Since both (a) objects that are independent of sensibility can be given to us as appearances through our sensible intuition and (b) objects can be given to God as they are in themselves through intellectual intuition, the objects, whether in (a) or in (b), can be said to exist according to the same criterion of existence. But, since the criterion determines the theory's ascription of existence to objects whether they are appearances or things in themselves, it is independent of the idealistic distinction between them. However, because the criterion is both unique and general, and yet hardly recognized among Kant scholars, it can inadvertently drive the continuing controversy over the correct interpretation of the idealism. Its uniqueness can encourage the interpretation that transcendental idealism consists of a single set of objects bearing dual aspects, say, empirical objects. On the other hand, its generality might encourage scholars to hold that its coverage can be divided between two sets of objects – appearances and things in themselves. Having lent its tacit support to both sides in the dispute over the correct interpretation of the dualism belonging to the idealism, the criterion may in fact be contributing to the continuation of the controversy. Perhaps awareness of this possibility may take some of the intensity out of the dispute and even lead it in a direction in which it could become more manageable, if not resolvable.

Finally, the two parts of the article can be connected. The existence of the independent objects that figure in the presuppositions of the necessary propositions of geometry is determined by the same criterion of existence that is independent of the very idealism that explains the necessity of those propositions. That is precisely why the criterion can underlie Kant's account of the necessity of geometry. Therefore, factors that appear to stand in opposition to each other are actually complementary to one another. And so it goes with Kant.

Notes

[1] See, for example, P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason'* (London: Methuen, 1966), e.g. pp. 21 ff., and Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

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2 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. All references to Kant's *Critique* are made in the customary way, to the first (A) and second (B) editions of the *Critique*, and all translations are from the Norman Kemp Smith translation, unless otherwise noted.

3 By 'epistemological criterion' I mean the criterion in Kant's theory of knowledge. It is not meant to cover any criterion that may belong to any knowledge itself that is subject to the theory, such as can be found in the second Postulate of Empirical Thought – actuality, or that may belong to Kant's metaphysics, such as may be found, for example, in the Transcendental Dialectic.

4 James Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 37 ff. See Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Oxford University Press, reprinted 1957 (first edn 1912), pp. 86–7, cited by Van Cleve, ibid., p. 38.

5 Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant*, p. 38.

6 Ibid., p. 40.

7 Ibid., p. 38.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 39.

12 Nicholas Rescher, 'Kant and the 'Special Constitution' of Man's Mind: The Ultimately Factual Basis of the Necessity and Universality of *A Priori* Synthetic Truths in Kant's Critical Philosophy', in *Studies in Modality*, American Philosophical Quarterly Monograph Series, 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 71–83, cited by Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant*, p. 38.

13 Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant*, p. 40.

14 Ibid.

15 P. F. Strawson, *Introduction to Logical Theory* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1952), pp. 175 ff.

16 This entails that the concept of these logically independent objects is not Kant's concept of things in themselves, since the former allows us to intuit them (and indeed is part of his theory that we do intuit them), whereas for Kant we cannot intuit things in themselves. For a concept of these objects that is expressed independently of the stipulated condition that they are constituents of the presupposed fact that we intuit them, see Robert Greenberg, *Kant's Theory of A Priori Knowledge* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001) chs 1and 2.

17 In contrast to the negative argument given above in support of Kant's theory of our attribution of necessity to the propositions of arithmetic and geometry – the argument that was given as a rebuttal of Van Cleve's strengthened argument, and that thereby lent support to

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defences of Kant's theory such as Rescher's defence of what he takes to be Kant notion of a contingent necessity – I still owe the reader a positive argument that will provide the derivation that was promised in section 1.2 above.

[18] It should be noted that the necessity in this case is that which belongs to the ascription only as it is a logical consequence of a set of propositions, and thus only as it is a conditional necessity, and not an absolute necessity. With the added proviso that certain of the conditions are contingencies, it would thus qualify as a contingent necessity, in Van Cleve's parlance. Hence, it would not be a necessity of a type Van Cleve would countenance, since it would involve rejecting the theorem of S4 mentioned above that Van Cleve accepts, namely, $\Box p \rightarrow \Box\Box p$. But then, what is not quite the same thing, Van Cleve's *denial* of necessity ascribed to a given proposition p is itself a *conditional* denial of necessity (see proposition 6 of Van Cleve's strengthened argument). In any case, Van Cleve's strengthened argument does not depend on this axiom of S4. Moreover, I have not only tried to rebut his strengthened argument, in section 1.2 above, but am now, in this section of the article, 1.4, supporting Kant's explanation of our ascription of necessity to geometric propositions with a positive argument of my own.

[19] At this point, I would like to thank Robert Hanna for his helpful review of the entire article and for his suggestions for its improvement. Of course, any deficiencies in the article remain my own responsibility. He finds that the interpretation of the *Critique* in the part of the article just completed – part 1 – is tantamount to his own model theoretic interpretation of the *Critique*: *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 2001), esp. pp. 239–264.

[20] See Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, and Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant*, for example, for dual-object interpretations of transcendental idealism.

[21] Probably the two best-known advocates of the dual aspect view are Gerold Prauss, *Kant und das Problem der Dinge an sich* (Bonn: Bovier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1974), ch. 2, and Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

[22] Perhaps Kant switched from 'primordial', or 'original' (*ursprünglich*), to 'divine' (*göttlichen*) when he came to characterizing the same being's cognitive *self-consciousness,* because he wanted to reserve 'original' for his characterization of *our* self-consciousness, that is, the self-consciousness of a being whose intuition is sensible. So he chose '*göttlichen*' instead of '*ursprünglich*' for the *self-consciousness* of a being whose intuition is intellectual and 'original' (B142).

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[23] See Rae Langton, *Kantian Humility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Of this concept of intellectual intuition Langton says, 'we strike depths which I have no ambition to plumb', p. 45. See also Ralph C. S. Walker, *Kant: The Arguments of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978). He also pronounces the concept a 'mysterious idea', p. 30.

[24] This can be viewed as a response to a criticism of P. F. Strawson's, *The Bounds of Sense*. It is that Kant fails to argue for a 'fundamental . . . complex premise of the *Critique*', p. 250. This is the premise that any knowledge involving perception that is the outcome of our being affected by things existing independently of perception cannot be knowledge of the things as they are in themselves; it can be knowledge 'only of those things as they appear', ibid. This same argument (in explanation and support of transcendental idealism) can also be viewed as supplementing and reinforcing the conclusions about transcendental idealism that were drawn above in part 1, section 1.3. Rae Langton takes Strawson's criticism as a challenge, and views her book as supplying the missing argument, *Kantian Humility*, p. 24.

[25] See note 23 above.

[26] Werner S. Pluhar, trans. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1996).

[27] The same considerations would bear upon the objects of 'all possible perceptions' (B165) – nature as the 'sum of all appearances' (B163) – and also upon the objects of 'experience in general' and correspondingly upon the objects of '*nature in general*', which can tell us what can be known as an object of experience (B165) .

[28] Among other places, see W. V. Quine, 'Existence and Quantification', in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 94.

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