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Kant's Anti-Cartesianism*

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Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism contributes both to epistemology and to Kant scholarship. It accurately identifies Kant's premises, analyses, and conclusions in order to answer the question: What should be Kant's conclusions, in view of whatever tenable premises he uses and sound analyses he provides? The answers are surprising, and surprisingly important, especially in today's philosophical context. Neo-Kantians and the tradition of "analytic transcendental" arguments growing out of Strawson's work sought to disengage Kant's proof of realism from his transcendental idealism, though without striking success. Analyzing Kant's profound anti-Cartesianism provides for success in this endeavour. Unlike those efforts, Kant did not seek the necessary transcendental conditions for self-conscious experience as such; he knew that to be both impossible and irrelevant to understanding *human* knowledge.[1] Kant sought the necessary transcendental conditions for the possibility of self-conscious *human* expe-

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rience. To do so, Kant sought to inventory our most basic cognitive capacities: in particular, our twelve basic functions of judgement and our two forms of intuition, space and time. These capacities provide both enabling conditions for our self-conscious experience, as well as constraints on the conditions under which human beings can be self-conscious. What these capacities are, and how they condition human experience, is investigated by what Kant called "transcendental reflection," the topic of Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 develops a "metaphysical dual aspect" interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism in order to understand what is at epistemological stake in Kant's claim that space and time are nothing but forms of human intuiting.[2] I contend that, although Kant's idealism is both highly metaphysical and coherent, it is subject to a devastating internal critique, developed throughout my book. In brief, I argue that Kant's arguments for transcendental idealism are invalid, that their invalidity is shown by principles central to Kant's Transcendental Analytic, and that Kant's idealism cannot deliver the philosophical results Kant sought from it: even if it were true, transcendental idealism does not suffice to prove that every spatiotemporal event we can witness has a cause, nor that Newton's basic laws of motion are *a priori*, nor that it alone can justify the possibility of free rational action. Instead, Kant's transcendental idealism is a highly instructive failure to fit human knowledge into the ancient model of *scientia*, in which particular claims are justified only by deducing them from first principles. Recognizing the failure of Kant's deductivist model of knowledge enables us to identify important, philosophically cogent strands of a compelling fallibilist model of knowledge in Kant's first *Critique* concerning both empirical and philosophical knowledge.

Recognizing the metaphysical character and the coherence of Kant's idealism enables us to identify Kant's very sophisticated semantics of cognitive reference.[3] An important joint implication of Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic is the key thesis defended by Evans (1975), i.e., that spatiotemporal designation of particular objects or events and the ascription of manifest characteristics to those particulars are *conjoint, mutually interdependent* achievements. To this Kant adds—rightly, I contend—that singular reference requires integrated exercise of both sensation and conception. Empirical knowledge requires singular cognitive reference, which requires singular sensory presentation. Definite descriptions cannot serve either cognitive role because nothing in a description, no matter how thorough or detailed, reveals whether it is empty, ambiguous, or definite (and so singular in its reference). For beings like us, locating the particular in space and time is necessary both for singular sensory presentation and for singular cognitive reference. I contend that Kant's semantics of cognitive reference suffices to support and to justify Kant's key theses regarding the nature and scope of human empirical knowledge.[4]

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A second reason why Kant's transcendental proof of realism about the objects of our empirical knowledge can be separated from his idealism, and defended philosophically, is that Kant developed more and stronger transcendental proofs of realism about spatiotemporal objects than he himself recognized. Chapter 3 examines Kant's account of "transcendental affinity" among the contents or objects of human sensation. Kant proves, on *a priori* transcendental grounds, that if there were no humanly detectable degree of regularity and variety among the content or objects of our sensory manifold (Kant uses both terms), we could not be self-conscious at all. Were we in such a (logically possible) condition of transcendental chaos, then (*per* Kant's Transcendental Deduction, Principles, and Refutation of Idealism), we could make no judgements at all; thus we could not distinguish at all between ourselves and whatever we sensed; thus we could not ascribe any experiences to ourselves, nor form any beliefs, nor make any claims about whatever we happened (*ex hypothesi*) to sense.

Kant attempts to explain this transcendental affinity as yet another transcendentally ideal condition for the possibility of self-conscious human experience. All these attempts fail because they conflate the reasons why this condition is *required* for us to enjoy self-conscious experience, with the reasons why this condition is *satisfied*. Kant's transcendental analyses can explain the former, brilliantly, though not the latter. Understanding why this is the case provides a sound version of the "neglected alternative" objection to Kant's own arguments for transcendental idealism, derived directly from one of Kant's most important transcendental analyses.[5] Kant's expositors have concentrated on the intellectual conditions required to synthesize representations (memorial, sensory, or conceptual) into one integrated, self-conscious awareness of this complex intensional object or experience. I contend that, on Kant's account, these intellectual conditions have genuinely transcendental, formal, though also *material* counterparts, one of which is the transcendental affinity of the sensory manifold. This factor has been neglected heretofore.[6] Kant argues cogently that the analytic unit of apperception is only possible on the basis of the synthetic unity of apperception (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B133). This is to say, briefly, that the "I think," which marks the analytic unity of apperception, can only accompany any plurality of our representations (cf. B131-32), if we integrate those representations into one complex representational act, which is to say, only if we thus achieve a synthetic unity of apperception of those representations. Yet Kant further argues—rightly, I contend—such a synthetic unity of apperception is possible only if there is transcendental affinity among our sensory manifold, which is to say, only if we can detect similarities and differences among the contents or the object(s) of our manifold of sensation. However, because transcendental idealism requires that the matter of sensation be given us *ab extra* (A20, B609, cf. B87-88, B784), it cannot account for the

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satisfaction of the principle of the transcendental affinity of the sensory manifold. Nevertheless, Kant is correct that this principle must *be* satisfied if we are to enjoy self-conscious experience. In brief, *pace* Kant, the transcendental analysis of the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of self-conscious human experience *can* prove that some mind-independent factors must obtain *if* we are to be self-conscious. Kant's direct arguments for transcendental idealism (in the Transcendental Aesthetic) neglect precisely this kind of alternative account of the satisfaction of genuinely transcendental conditions for the possibility of self-conscious human experience. Moreover, understanding how Kant proves that there must be transcendental affinity among the contents or objects of our sensations ultimately provides a genuine transcendental proof of mental content externalism, the thesis that at least some basic "mental" states can occur, and can have the content they do, only due to their relations to mind-independent spatio-temporal objects or events. Kant's proof is thus distinct from and much stronger than recent anti-sceptical arguments that take mental content externalism for a key premise. That Kant's analyses ultimately argue for mental content externalism is a major anti-Cartesian result.[7]

Chapters 4 to 6 examine in unprecedented detail the crippling "gap" Kant discovered in his Critical system. Understanding this gap reveals a second transcendental proof of mental content externalism in Kant's first *Critique*. Guyer showed that the principles of causal judgement Kant defends in the Analogies of Experience form a mutually integrated set: we can use any one of these principles only by conjointly using all three. This is because making any causal judgement requires *discriminating* between the following alternative causal scenarios: cases of one thing replacing another in space and time (change of substances), or one thing undergoing a change in characteristics (with continuity of substance), or one thing undergoing a local or translational motion (Guyer 1987, pp. 168, 212-14, 224-25, 228, 239, 246, 274-75). I extend Guyer's important finding by arguing that the crippling problem in Kant's analysis is that the only causal principle formulated and defended in the first *Critique* is the general causal principle, every event has a cause. However, the three principles of causal judgement defended in the three Analogies of Experience require the much more specific causal principle that every physical event has an external physical cause. Kant distinguishes these two principles only in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (and again in the published Introduction to the third *Critique*), where he recognizes that this specific causal principle cannot be proven solely on transcendental grounds, but requires Critical metaphysics as well. Unfortunately, Kant's metaphysical attempt to prove this specific causal thesis also fails. Very briefly, neither Kant's transcendental nor his metaphysical grounds suffice to rule out the possibility of hylozoism, the idea that matter might not

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be simply dead, massy stuff subject to the law of inertia, that possibly it could have some internal principle of change or motion. The result is that Kant's transcendental and metaphysical analyses of the necessary *a priori* conditions for self-conscious human experience can demonstrate only a conditional, though nevertheless philosophically crucial, necessity: Only if in fact we perceive and know at least some spatiotemporal, causally interacting substances can we be conscious of ourselves, because we identify those objects and events and thereby distinguish ourselves from them. In brief, I argue that in this way Kant's Refutation of Idealism can be given a sound formulation, without any appeal to Kant's transcendental idealism. In this regard, Kant's transcendental proofs of the conditions for self-ascription of experience, which include the conditions for genuine and justified causal judgements about local spatiotemporal and causally interacting perceptible substances, ultimately provide a second, genuinely transcendental proof of mental content externalism. Once again, this is a major anti-Cartesian result.

Chapter 7 draws these considerations together and highlights the importance of Kant's semantics of cognitive reference. I contend that Kant's semantics, together with his analysis of causal judgements, suffice to prove three philosophically important conclusions: determinism in empirical psychology is, in principle, indemonstrable; the specific causal principle is justified as a transcendental condition for the possibility of self-conscious human experience; and global perceptual scepticism requires both unwarranted Cartesian presumptions (including infallibilist notions about justification and mental content internalism) and cognitively illegitimate, transcendent speculation. Proving that psychological determinism is in principle *in*demonstrable provides sufficient Kantian grounds to appeal to practical philosophy to determine whether we are morally free. Proving the legitimacy of the specific causal principle on these revised transcendental grounds provides the final step of a sound, transcendental proof of realism about spatiotemporal objects. Exposing global sceptical hypotheses (including Stroud's) as illicit, transcendent, profoundly Cartesian illusions highlights the abiding influence of Cartesianism in contemporary epistemology, and the continuing philosophical importance of Kant's anti-Cartesian epistemology.[8]

Notes

1 More precisely, Kant seeks to identify and to analyze the transcendental conditions for the possibility of self-conscious experience for beings who share our twelve basic functions of judgement and our two forms of sensory intuition, space and time. Because humans are the only examples of such beings known to Kant or to us, I confine my remarks to Kant's analysis of human cognition in order to contrast it with the common assumption among commentators that Kant sought the transcendental conditions for the possibility of self-conscious

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experience as such. I argue *in extenso* in the book that this assumption is deeply mistaken (cf. Kitcher 1995).

2 I argue against "anodyne" interpretations of Kant's transcendental idealism in Westphal 1998, 2001, and 2004a, chap. 1. For telling criticism of Van Cleve's (1999) phenomenalist interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism, see Ameriks 2006.

3 The groundbreaking studies by Melnick (1989) and Hanna (2001) also examine in highly illuminating ways Kant's sophisticated and philosophically incisive semantic theory, though without making the points highlighted in my study.

4 In Westphal 2006b I argue that Kant's analysis of these points about semantic and cognitive reference succeeds much better than McDowell's use of Kant (or Hegel) to show that sensibility and understanding can only be exercised conjointly within human knowledge and experience. Also see Rosenberg 2007.

5 Very briefly, Kant argues for transcendental idealism by arguing that neither Newton's absolute nor Leibniz's relational account of space can explain why we have an *a priori* concept of space, whereas Kant's transcendental idealist account of space, according to which space itself is nothing but our form of outer intuition, can explain why we have this concept. (Kant gives parallel arguments about time and our concept of time.) A key critical question from Kant's day onward has been whether there is another account of space and time that can account for our having *a priori* concepts of space and time which does not invoke idealism, or at least not Kant's transcendental idealism. This, in brief, is the problem of the neglected alternative.

6 For concise discussion of this point, see Westphal 2004b.

7 Only two Cartesian tenets are discussed here: mental content externalism and deductivist or infallibilist conceptions of epistemic justification. Other Cartesian tenets are discussed in the present book, and further discussed in Westphal 2007.

8 A detailed overview of the constructive analysis developed in my book is presented in Westphal 2006a.

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