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Comments on Graham Bird's *The Revolutionary Kant*

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1

It is simply splendid that the UK and the North American Kant Societies have organized this joint session honouring Graham Bird and his very considerable contributions to philosophy and especially to our understanding of Kant. I am very grateful to the organizers for allowing me to pay tribute to Graham, whose collegiality I have enjoyed and benefited from very much over many years. My concise remarks focus on his genuinely impressive and important new commentary, *The Revolutionary Kant* (*TRK*).

1.1

Bird's 'revolutionary' Kant rejects traditional epistemological preoccupation with the ego-centric predicament and the hopeless aim of reconstructing knowledge of a public world based on nothing but (allegedly) private, mental sensory states. This form of normative epistemology Kant replaced with a 'descriptive metaphysics' of experience. Since Gettier's (1963) classic critique of epistemology based solely on conceptual analysis, analytic philosophers have developed a wide range of decidedly anti-Cartesian views in epistemology and philosophy of mind. Yet Kant is the original and is still one of the most profound anti-, and even more importantly, *non*-Cartesian philosophers, whose views in this regard remain a towering achievement largely neglected by contemporary philosophers (Westphal 2007a, 2007b). Bird's *TRK* rightly and very fruitfully highlights Kant's pioneering anti-Cartesianism and his radically non-Cartesian and non-empiricist alternative to understanding human knowledge.

1.2

One might wonder how a 'descriptive' metaphysics of experience could address the normative concerns of epistemologists. In effect, Bird sagaciously develops Sellars's interpretation of Kant's Transcendental

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Deduction, not as a *proof*, but rather as a sophisticated theory of judgement which resolves both scepticism and much epistemological debate because both depend upon seriously inadequate pictures and analyses of the mind, nature and their relations.[1] Rectifying these deficiencies requires a cogent philosophy of mind which dispels sceptical and epistemological quandaries. Bird illuminates how Kant achieves these results by drawing attention to Kant's methods, especially to Kant's 'transcendental Topic' and his 'transcendental reflection' (esp. 540–3), two widely and unfortunately neglected issues in the secondary literature. Very briefly, Kant's transcendental Topic concerns the proper inventory of our basic and especially of our *a priori* cognitive capacities and resources, including concepts, intuitions, forms of judgement, forms of intuiting and other forms of representation. Yet Kant's transcendental Topic is not simply a list; it carefully identifies to which of our fundamental cognitive capacities – sensibility, understanding or reason – these various cognitive resources belong so that we can identify their legitimate roles in knowledge and distinguish these from their misuse. Hence transcendental reflection informed by Kant's transcendental Topic enables Kant – and if we study him attentively, enables us – to diagnose fundamental confusions in traditional metaphysics and epistemology, including many modern confusions which have persisted well into contemporary philosophy, including, centrally, Cartesianism, though also rationalism, empiricism, Platonism and scepticism. Kant's transcendental Topic has long required careful examination; one of Bird's great achievements is to have illuminated Kant's Topic so very well.

1.3

A very important feature of Bird's commentary is to highlight so centrally a crucial result of Kant's transcendental reflection and transcendental topic, namely, Kant's subtle and incisive cognitive semantics. Perhaps the most serious error in Strawson's *Bounds of Sense* (1966: 16) is to have assimilated Kant's semantics to verificationism.[2] To the contrary, Bird rightly emphasizes that Kant has a threefold account of conceptual significance. Our *a priori* categories each have a highly abstract conceptual content as functions of judgement brought to bear on the spatial and temporal manifolds which are our sensory forms of intuiting. They acquire a second, richer complement of significance when they are schematized so as to be applicable to particulars presented within our forms of intuiting. However, they only acquire fully determinate, specifically cognitive significance when they are referred to specific, localized particulars through singular sensory presentation.[3]

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The importance of Kant's cognitive semantics can hardly be overestimated. Kant's semantics provides excellent grounds for rejecting verificationist theories of meaning – amply corroborated by the persistent failures of twentieth-century empiricist efforts to expound an adequate version of such a theory – whilst nevertheless preserving one of the core aims of verificationism, namely, to ensure that genuine cognitive claims about particulars require locating those particulars in time and, when relevant, space. In one stroke Kant refutes the transcendent pretentions of rationalism and theology, along with a primary form of empiricist scepticism, whilst eschewing 'knowledge by acquaintance', refuting descriptive theories of reference and avoiding objections made today to so-called 'direct' theories of reference.

In this important regard, Bird's commentary makes abundantly clear that researching the history of philosophy is a *philosophical*, not merely an antiquarian undertaking. Kant's 'changed method of thinking (*veränderte Methode der Denkungsart*)' (Bxviii) discloses enormously important philosophical vistas which remain vital today, not least because his cognitive semantics has direct and profound implications for the fallibilist character of empirical justification, both in commonsense knowledge and in natural science, and because it shows – far more directly and cogently than McDowell (see Westphal 2006) – that 'sensibility' and 'understanding' are and must be fully integrated in any human awareness of any particular object or event.

1.4

Bird notes the advantages and disadvantages of the commentary genre as compared with the monograph (xiii–xiv). Because his commentary follows, as it must, Kant's order of exposition, Bird's analysis and assessment of many core features of Kant's views are distributed throughout his commentary, as they are distributed throughout Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Fortunately for us, unlike Kant, Bird carefully cross-references these various discussions and helps us track their philosophical development, both within his own commentary and within Kant's *Critique*. Of particular importance in this regard is Bird's demonstration that Kant's Transcendental Analytic cannot be fully or rightly understood without equal attention to Kant's Transcendental Dialectic; both are coordinate, integrated parts of Kant's Transcendental Logic. This is a refreshing corrective to the long-standing tendency, especially in Anglophone studies, to focus solely upon the Transcendental Analytic.

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1.5

TRK provides concise, cogent expositions and summaries of Kant's views in each section of the *Critique*, each clearly distinguished by Bird from his critical assessment of the same. Accordingly it shall prove to be an excellent teaching tool as well as contributing so mightily to Kant research. If his commentary format does not allow for the last word on many important topics, Bird graciously acknowledges this by frequently posing serious, cogent questions for further research.

In these and in many other ways, Bird's commentary is refreshing, vigorous, challenging, lucid and highly illuminating; it clearly deserves the high praise it received from Michael Friedman, Gordon Brittan and Paul Abela proudly recorded on the back cover (of the paperback edition).

In some cases, however, I do not believe Bird has pursued Kant's key issues far enough. I shall briefly detail two examples concerning Kant's Analogies of Experience.

2

Bird contends that Kant's Analogies of Experience have a carefully restricted and far more modest aim than is commonly supposed, namely: to establish that the use of certain *a priori* concepts and principles is required for us so much as to recognize even putative events, whether inner or outer. This aim, Bird contends, does not require Kant to provide empirical criteria for distinguishing, within those events which are our successive perceptions, between those sequences attributable simply to the vagaries of our perception and those attributable to objective sequences, i.e. worldly events (486). In this connection Bird states:

> Kant may still be criticized for not developing the empirical realization of the a priori categorial structure but this is a misunderstanding rather than an objection. It points to a further enquiry into the full empirical realization of the a priori structure which is not in *conflict* with Kant's interest but a natural *extension* of it. It points towards that extension in what he would regard as applied philosophy in such works as the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Such an extension is clearly and well portrayed in Michael Friedman's account of Newtonian absolute motion in his *Kant and the Exact Sciences* (Pt. I chap. 3). The account shows how Kant's a priori framework applies to physics in its identification of

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> an appropriate representative of Newton's central concepts and of time itself. The only, but essential, proviso to be made is that such an account is by Kant's standards not pure but impure a priori. It says something about the empirical realization of the categories in a context which goes beyond *ordinary* empirical experience but is *not* purely a priori and transcendental. (Bird 2006: 486)

About this statement I have several reservations.

2.1

First, rather than omitting empirical criteria for using the principles of the Analogies, Kant expressly mentions and advocates such criteria at B249[4] and B250–1.[5]

2.2

Second, Kant expressly required and sought the necessary conditions which suffice for the possibility of unified self-conscious experience. Kant states that transcendental philosophy

> must formulate by means of universal but *sufficient marks* the conditions under which objects can be given in harmony with these [pure] concepts [of the understanding]. Otherwise the concepts would be void of all content, and therefore mere logical forms, not pure concepts of the understanding. (A136/B175; emphasis added; cf. A90/B123[6])

2.3

Third, in this passage Bird appears to misrepresent the respective characters, aims, methods and roles of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. Unfortunately, Friedman's (1992a) account of Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations* – on which Bird relies at this crucial juncture – is unreliable.

Very briefly, Friedman (1992: 165, 183) aims to understand Kant's claim, in both the first *Critique* and in the *Prolegomena*, that the understanding prescribes laws to nature. To do so he interprets the Transcendental Analytic of Kant's first *Critique* in terms of *Metaphysical Foundations* and the *Metaphysical Foundations* in terms of Newtonian physics. According to Friedman, the three laws of motion defended by Kant in the third chapter of the *Metaphysical Foundations*, 'Mechanics', realize the principles of the three Analogies of Experience

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by specifying their application to the empirical concept of matter as 'the movable in space', thereby schematizing them sufficiently to apply to objects of experience (Friedman 1992: 46, 136–7, 159, 163–4, 171, 185, 202–3, 234, 255, 259). Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations* replaces Newton's postulates of absolute space and time with a procedure, adapted from Newton's *Principia* book 3, for constructing frames of reference from regions of space and motions of bodies within them (Friedman 1992: 140–3). Within Kant's procedure, the law of gravity has a mixed status because it is derived from *a priori* laws of the understanding (specifically the principles of the Analogies) and of sensibility (Euclidean geometry) together with the empirical data of experience (Brahe and Kepler) (Friedman 1992: 167, 177–8). The immediacy and universality of gravitational attraction are not merely empirical properties of matter known inductively; they are necessary presuppositions for determining the true motions of material bodies, and hence are conditions for the possibility of objective experience of them (Friedman 1992: 158, 171, 174, 231 n. 29, 235).

Exhilarating though it may be, Friedman's reconstruction departs significantly from Kant's text, aims and analysis. One such point is especially germane here: Kant's analogies of experience cannot be so closely tied to or so dependent upon Newtonian physics as Friedman repeatedly insists. The principles of the analogies are jointly necessary to identify coexisting objects, objects which move and objects which undergo non-spatial changes of state;[7] indeed, they are necessary to determine even the apparent time series in our sensory apprehension (A199–200/B244–5). Consequently, using these principles is necessary in order first to identify planets and their apparent motions, or even our instruments and records of astronomical and terrestrial observations. These principles are necessary for collecting Brahe's data and for formulating Kepler's laws, on the basis of which alone Newton developed his gravitational theory. Newton's laws of motion may be necessary for distinguishing true from apparent planetary motions, but they are not and cannot be required for using the principles of the Analogies to identify specific particulars in order to afford self-conscious experience of them.[8] In brief, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* must explain and justify our common-sense identifications of and causal judgements about spatio-temporal objects and events prior to and independently of any issues pertaining to natural science, and especially to any purported *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*.[9] Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations* does not and cannot play the role assigned to it by Friedman nor – in the passage quoted above – by Bird.

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2.4

At the end of the quoted passage Bird rightly draws attention to the contrast within Kant's *a priori* analysis between what is 'pure' and what is 'impure' *a priori*. However, he does not appear to recognize where this important distinction falls. It does not fall simply between the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Metaphysical Foundations*. For all of his stress on the pure *a priori* status of his transcendental analysis, in fact Kant makes impure *a priori* analysis central to his transcendental project already in the opening pages of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Westphal 2004: §35.2). My understanding of this point was greatly expanded by the outstanding, though unjustly neglected work on this topic by Konrad Cramer (1985; cf. Westphal 1995a: §4).

3

If the preceding suggestions (section 2) are correct, then Kant owes us empirical criteria for distinguishing between our perceptions of stable states of affairs and our perceptions of objective events. Here I cannot review Kant's account in detail, though I can summarize one important feature of it.

3.1

Bird calls attention to important links between Kant's three Analogies of Experience, and mentions that others such as Gardner (1990) and Longuenesse (1998) have also noted them. Allison (2004) in his second edition and Watkins (2005) have done likewise, though too recently for Bird to have taken their studies into account. The recognition of these links is salutary, especially in view of the previous, long-standing conviction among Anglophone commentators that Kant's 'answer to Hume' must be contained in the Second Analogy alone.

3.2

However, the relations among Kant's Analogies are much closer and more significant than has generally been recognized, even in these recent studies: Kant's three principles of causal judgement form a tightly integrated set. No one of the three principles of causal judgement can be used without conjoint use of all three principles. Kant thereby shows that causal judgements are *discriminatory*. Determining which causal scenario we actually perceive requires discriminating it from its (experientially) possible alternatives.

Very briefly, Kant argues for this result: the empirical criterion of succession is lack of reversibility of the type of sequence of appearances produced by

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one or more objects; the empirical criterion of coexistence is the reversibility of the type of sequence of appearances produced by one or more objects. Determining that either objective coexistence or objective succession occurs requires determining that the other does not, where both determinations require that we identify objects which persist through both the real and the apparent changes involved in any sequence of perceptual appearances. We cannot directly perceive or ascertain either time or (as Kant notes in the Third Analogy) space, and the mere order in which we apprehend appearances does not determine any objective order of objects or events. Consequently, the only condition under which we can determine which states of affairs precede, and which coexist with, which others is if there are enduring substances which interact, thereby producing changes of state or location in one another. Enduring substances are necessary for us to determine the variety of spatial locations, to determine changes of place and to determine non-spatial changes objects undergo. To determine whether a change of appearances is a function of one object, previously in view, moving out of view when displaced by another, or instead is a function of one object rotating to reveal a different aspect or instead is a function of one spatially stable object undergoing a non-spatial change of state, requires that we are able to identify places, changes of state and objects which change orientation, place or state, and that we are able to distinguish these different kinds of scenario. To make any one such identification or distinction requires conjoint use of all three principles of causal judgement defended in the Analogies. None of the principles defended in the Analogies can stand alone; they all stand together, or they stand not at all.

Thus Kant's three Analogies are far more closely, and far more significantly, integrated than has generally been recognized. Here I have merely summarized Guyer's (1987) findings.[10] It is remarkable that Guyer's major insight about the integrity of the three Analogies has received little notice in the secondary literature.[11]

3.3

Because our competent, conjoint use of the three principles of causal judgement defended in the Analogies is required for us to identify spatio-temporal particulars, these principles and the judgements they afford are a crucial component of Kant's semantics of singular cognitive reference.

3.4

Bird stresses the parity between the objects of inner and outer sense in Kant's Analogies, citing *inter alia* §15 of Kant's *Prolegomena* for support (488).

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However, this parity broke down conclusively subsequent to the *Prolegomena* (1783) when Kant wrote the *Metaphysical Foundations* (1786), during which he discovered that in principle there can be no metaphysical foundations for scientific psychology because we cannot make any legitimate causal judgements within the form of inner sense alone (see Westphal 1995c). This realization conclusively confirmed the priority of outer sense and its objects just as Kant prepared the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), though this priority is already present in the first edition (see Westphal 2004: §34). This point contributes directly to Kant's 'Refutation of Idealism'.

4

My reservations notwithstanding, I sincerely applaud Bird's great achievement and stress that the conclusions we share, especially about Kant's truly revolutionary anti-Cartesianism and his semantics of singular cognitive reference, are far more substantive and important than our disagreements.

Notes

1 See Sellars's 1976 lectures on Kant's *Critique* (2002: 78).

2 According to Strawson (1966: 16), Kant's principle of significance is that 'there can be no legitimate, or even meaningful, employment of ideas or concepts which does not relate them to empirical or experiential conditions of their application'. He cites two statements to support this claim, and asserts that 'these sentences [from B195 and B724] are typical of dozens in the *Critique*' (1996: 16 n. 1).

3 Independently, I argued for essentially the same view of Kant's semantics (Westphal 2004); I am delighted by our convergence on this issue.

4 *'Demnach ist die Zeitfolge allerdings das einzige empirische Kriterium der Wirkung in Beziehung auf die Causalität der Ursache, die vorhergeht*. Das Glas ist die Ursache von dem Steigen des Wassers über seine Horizontalfläche, obgleich beide Erscheinungen zugleich sind. Denn so bald ich dieses aus einem größeren Gefäß mit dem Glase schöpfe, so erfolgt etwas, nämlich die Veränderung des Horizontalstandes, den es dort hatte, in einen concaven, den es im Glase annimmt.'
'Diese Causalität führt auf den Begriff der Handlung, diese auf den Begriff der Kraft und dadurch auf den Begriff der Substanz … *Allein das empirische Kriterium einer Substanz, so fern sie sich nicht durch die Beharrlichkeit der Erscheinung, sondern besser und leichter durch Handlung zu offenbaren scheint, kann ich nicht unberührt lassen*.' (B249; emphasis added.)

5 'Weil nun alle Wirkung in dem besteht, was da geschieht, mithin im Wandelbaren, was die Zeit der Succession nach bezeichnet: so ist das letzte Subject desselben das Beharrliche als das Substratum alles Wechselnden, d.i. die Substanz. Denn nach dem Grundsatze der Causalität sind Handlungen immer der erste Grund von allem Wechsel der Erscheinungen und können also nicht in einem Subject liegen, was selbst wechselt, weil sonst andere Handlungen und ein anderes Subject, welches diesen Wechsel bestimmte, erforderlich wären. Kraft dessen beweiset nun Handlung, als *ein hinreichendes empirisches Kriterium*, die Substantialität, ohne daß ich die Beharrlichkeit

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desselben durch verglichene Wahrnehmungen allererst zu suchen nöthig hätte, welches auch auf diesem Wege mit der Ausführlichkeit nicht geschehen könnte, die zu der Größe und strengen Allgemeingültigkeit des Begriffs erforderlich ist. Denn daß das erste Subject der Causalität alles Entstehens und Vergehens selbst nicht (im Felde der Erscheinungen) entstehen und vergehen könne, ist ein sicherer Schluß, der auf empirische Nothwendigkeit und Beharrlichkeit im Dasein, mithin auf den Begriff einer Substanz als Erscheinung ausläuft.' (B250–1; emphasis added.)

6 '… [die] Bedingungen, deren der Verstand zur synthetischen Einheit des Denkens bedarf' (A90/B123).

7 See Guyer 1987: 168, 212–14, 224–5, 228, 239, 246, 274–5.

8 *Contra* Friedman's (1992: 174 n. 14) claim that 'in order to apply this concept [*sc*. of matter as the movable in space] we thus need an objective notion of true [*sc*. Newtonian] motion' – as if no one had correctly applied the minimal concept of 'moving object' prior to learning Newton's theory! On 403 and in n. 11 to that page (on 820) Bird recognizes that Kant's Principles cannot be so closely tied to physics as Friedman contends. I do not understand how his clear recognition of this point there is consistent with his apparent neglect of this point in the passage quoted above from 486.

9 I examined the deficiencies of Friedman's (1992) treatment of Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations* in Westphal (1995b: §X); *cf*. Westphal (2004: §33).

10 See above, n. 7.

11 I discussed Guyer's finding in Westphal (1995a) and (1995c) and augmented it in Westphal (1995a, 2004).

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