

Justin B. Shaddock

Spring 2011

Dissertation Title: *Kant's Transcendental Methodology*

Committee: Robert Pippin (chair), Michael Forster, Karl Ameriks (University of Notre Dame), and Paul Franks (University of Toronto)

Abstract: I argue for an original interpretation of Kant's philosophical methodology in his transcendental deduction of the categories. My focus is on Kant's idea that the self-knowledge of our finite cognitive subjectivity is a method for justifying our metaphysical knowledge of empirical objects. My key contribution to the contemporary literature is to draw a novel distinction between two kinds of Kantian self-knowledge, or to pull apart two strands in Kant's thinking on our subjectivity. I argue that one strand is merely subjective, and that we should consider it philosophically unacceptable, even by Kant's own lights. This subjectivist strand comprises Kant's doctrines of transcendental psychology and transcendental idealism. His transcendental psychology specifies how subjects constituted *a priori* such as ourselves cannot help but think, while his transcendental idealism specifies how things must appear to subjects constituted *a priori* such as we are. Both attribute a merely subjective necessity to the categories. I argue that there is another strand in Kant's thinking on our subjectivity, however, which comprises what I call Kant's transcendental methodology. This methodological strand in Kant's thought is less explicit in his text, but is rather implicit, first, in his theory of our cognitive faculties, and then, in his deduction's transcendental argument. My aim is to make this

methodological strand fully explicit, and to argue that it has genuine philosophical respectability. I argue that Kant's transcendental methodology includes, first, his transcendental method – which is to analyze the finitude of our cognitive subjectivity – and second, his methodological idealism, which posits a mutual interdependence of empirical objectivity and our finite cognitive subjectivity for their very intelligibility as such. While Kant's subjectivist doctrines of transcendental psychology and transcendental idealism ascribe a merely subjective necessity to the categories, I argue that these methodological theories on our subjectivity are integral to the deduction's proof of the objective validity of the categories.

1. I begin with a puzzle. On one hand, Kant's project is metaphysical. It is to justify our use of the categories in our experience. Kant opposes Humean skepticism's reductive explanation of our use of the categories in terms of the subjective constitution of our cognitive faculty. He instead aims to justify our use of the categories on the grounds that empirical objects have a categorial structure. On the other hand, however, Kant's method is transcendental. It is to analyze our cognitive faculty. This is a puzzle. For, how can Kant's transcendental investigation of our cognitive subjectivity discover the metaphysical structure of empirical objects? I call this the puzzle of Kant's transcendental metaphysics. In this abstract, I will further elaborate this puzzle, then I will outline my argument that the interpretations in the contemporary literature fail to solve the puzzle, and finally, I will describe my solution to the puzzle by outlining my original interpretation of Kant's deduction.

I have said that Kant's project in his deduction is to justify our use of the categories in our experience. The categories are our *a priori* concepts. When we apply empirical concepts to objects, we make contingent claims about the way things happen to be, such as the claim that this

desk I am sitting at is black. When we apply the categories to objects, by contrast, we make necessary claims about the way things must be. For example, when we use the category of cause in the claim that the baseball striking the window causes the window to break, we claim that the baseball striking the window necessitates the window breaking, or in other words, that the baseball striking the window makes it the case that the window must break. Kant maintains that our experience is a source of our knowledge about the way things are, but not about the way things must be. We can know from experience that the table is black, but not that the baseball striking the window causes the window to break. So, for Kant, our experience can justify our application of our empirical concepts to objects, but it cannot justify our application of our *a priori* concepts to objects. Kant's philosophical problem, therefore, is to answer the question: What does justify our application of the categories to objects? Kant formulates his answer by stating that the categories make the cognition of objects possible, or that the categories are conditions of the possibility of experience. But what do these formulations mean?

We can better understand what Kant means by identifying the sort of skepticism that he opposes in his deduction. This skepticism denies that our use of the categories in our experience is justified. While this skepticism is often thought to be kind of Cartesian skepticism, it is rather a sort of Humean skepticism. The Cartesian skeptic brings us to doubt or deny that we have any knowledge of even contingent matters of fact. This skeptic bring me to ask, for example, "How do I know that I am sitting at a black desk, and not in bed asleep dreaming that I am sitting at a black desk?" Since Kant thinks that experience is a source of knowledge of contingent matters of fact, he does not think that Cartesian skepticism represents an especially pressing philosophical problem.

Humean skepticism, by contrast, does amount to a real philosophical challenge for Kant. Humean skepticism, as Kant understands it, allows that we have knowledge of contingent matters of fact, but brings us to doubt or deny that we have metaphysical knowledge of necessity. The Humean skeptic grants, for example, both my claim to know that the baseball strikes the window, and my claim to know that the baseball striking the window is succeeded by the window breaking. What the Humean skeptic brings me to doubt or deny that is the baseball striking the window causes the window to break. The Humean skeptic brings me to ask, “How do I know not just that the baseball strikes the window and that this is succeeded by the window breaking, but that the baseball striking the window necessitates the window breaking?” The Humean skeptic thus grants the justification of my use of the empirical concept of succession in my experience, but denies that my use of the category of cause in my experience is justified.

This skeptical challenge is only one side of Humean skepticism, as Kant understands it, however. While the Humean skeptic denies that our use of the categories in our experience is justified, he nevertheless maintains that we must in fact use the categories in our experience. The Humean skeptic offers a reductive account of this necessary use of the categories in terms of the subjective constitution of our cognitive faculty. According to this reductive account, we must use the categories in our experience, but the reason why we must do so is just because of the habits of association that we have developed over the course of our experience. In this way, the Humean skeptic ascribes a merely subjectively necessity to the categories.

Kant criticizes the theory of pre-established harmony in his deduction for granting what the skeptic wishes most. But how could this be? Pre-established harmony, for Kant, is the theory that we must use the categories in our experience, and that empirical objects must have a categorial structure, but that the reason why we must use the categories in our experience, and

the reason why empirical objects must have a categorial structure, is because God constitutes both our cognitive subjectivity and empirical objectivity *a priori*. This pre-established theory grants what the skeptic wishes most, according to Kant, because, like Humean skepticism, it accounts for the use of the categories in our experience in terms of the subjective constitution of our cognitive faculty. While the Humean skeptic attributes our necessary use of the categories in our experience to the habituated constitution of our cognitive faculty, this pre-established harmony theory attributes our necessary use of the categories in our experience to the *a priori* constitution of our cognitive faculty. Kant therefore rejects pre-established harmony. His reason is that just as our use of the categories would be unjustified if it were grounded in the empirical or contingent constitution of our cognitive subjectivity, as the Humean skeptic proposes, so too would our use of the categories be unjustified if it were grounded in the transcendental or *a priori* constitution of our cognitive subjectivity, as pre-established harmony proposes. In either case, our use of the categories would be merely subjectively necessary.

Now, Kant's aim in his deduction is not to refute skepticism, but to articulate an alternative to skepticism. Kant thinks that skepticism does not need to be refuted, since its account of the categories as merely subjectively necessary contradicts the fact, attested by common sense, mathematics, and natural science, that we do have metaphysical knowledge of necessity. But Kant thinks that it is not obvious how there could be an account of the categories as being not merely subjectively, but objectively necessary. Kant's project therefore, is to justify our use of the categories in our experience, and to do so by grounding this use not on the subjective constitution of our cognitive faculty – neither the habituated nor the *a priori* constitution of our cognitive faculty – but instead on the categorial structure of empirical objects. When Kant says that his aim is to justify our use of the categories in our experience by proving

that the categories make the cognition of objects possible, or that the categories are the conditions of the possibility of experience, what he means is that he intends to prove that we must use the categories in our experience, and that the reason why we must do so is because objects of experience have a categorial structure.

This is only one side of Kant's thinking, however, the metaphysical side. But there is another side as well, the transcendental side. Kant states that his transcendental method is to analyze our cognitive faculty. Kant distinguishes this transcendental method from the Rationalist method of analyzing our concepts, whether by the principle of non-contradiction or of sufficient reason. Kant's transcendental method also differs from the empiricist method of specifying the operations of our cognitive faculty. Kant's method is to identify what it is even to be a finite cognitive faculty in the first place. But there is a puzzle in fitting the two sides of Kant's thinking together. For, how can Kant's transcendental investigation of our finite cognitive subjectivity discover the categorial structure of empirical objectivity? How can there be a transcendental metaphysics? I will now outline my argument that the dominant interpretations in the contemporary literature fail to solve this puzzle, and then present my solution.

2. Since 1966, when P.F. Strawson published *The Bounds of Sense*, interpreters of Kant have, in large part, pursued one of just two options. One option is to follow Strawson in thinking that we have much to learn from Kant's deduction, but only if we reconstruct his transcendental argument and reject his doctrines on our transcendental subjectivity. Strawson thus aims to save the metaphysical side of Kant's thinking, precisely by separating it from the transcendental side. In this way, he gives up on solving the puzzle of Kant's transcendental metaphysics. Strawson's reconstruction aims to prove that a necessary feature of our experience logically presupposes that

there is a necessary structure to the empirical world. Barry Stroud has given a decisive criticism of Strawson's argument, however. Stroud's criticism is that since Strawson's reconstruction premises only a necessary feature of our experience, it can establish only more necessary features of our experience, not the ambitious metaphysical result that the empirical world has a categorial structure. Thus, Strawson not only fails to fit the transcendental and metaphysical sides of Kant's thinking together, but even fails on his own terms to do justice to the metaphysical side.

The other option is taken by critics of Strawson, such as Patricia Kitcher and Henry Allison. Kitcher and Allison aim to recuperate Kant's subjectivist doctrines of transcendental psychology and transcendental idealism. They aim to do so by showing that these doctrines are integral to Kant's transcendental argument. Thus, unlike Strawson, Kitcher and Allison aim to bring the metaphysical and transcendental sides of Kant's thinking together. Kant's transcendental psychology, which Kitcher defends, attributes the necessary structure of our experience to the *a priori* constitution of our cognitive subjectivity. According to Kitcher, the way that Kant justifies our use of the categories in our experience is by proving that subjects constituted *a priori* such as ourselves cannot do otherwise than to use the categories in our experience. Kant's transcendental idealism, which Allison defends, ascribes the necessary structure of the empirical world likewise to the *a priori* constitution of our cognitive subjectivity. According to Allison, Kant proves that empirical objects have a categorial structure, and he does so by showing that empirical objects must have a categorial structure because they necessarily conform to our cognitive faculty's *a priori* constitution and the categories are our *a priori* concepts. I argue, however, that Kitcher and Allison fail to bring the transcendental and metaphysical sides of his thinking together, and thus fail on their own terms to redeem the

transcendental side itself. On one hand, I argue that Kant's doctrines of transcendental psychology and transcendental idealism are not in fact integral to his deduction, but rather peripheral to it. On the other hand, I argue that these subjectivist doctrines would actually undermine Kant's deduction by causing the objective validity of the categories to collapse into the very sort of skepticism that Kant explicitly opposes, the skepticism according to which our use of the categories in experience is merely subjectively necessary.

3. So what is my alternative? I argue for a new interpretation by charting a middle course between Strawson's, on one hand, and Kitcher's and Allison's, on the other. I argue that the metaphysical and transcendental sides of Kant's thinking can be fit together, but only by sharply distinguishing the methodological strand in Kant's theory of our subjectivity from the subjectivist strand. I argue that we do have much to learn from Kant's deduction, and that in order to do so, on one hand, we must reject his subjectivist doctrines of transcendental psychology and transcendental idealism for being incompatible with his deduction, but on the other, we must appreciate the integral role that Kant's theory on our cognitive subjectivity contained in his transcendental methodology has to play in his deduction's proof.

Let me say more about my key distinction between, on one side, Kant's unacceptable subjectivist doctrines of transcendental psychology and transcendental idealism, and on the other, his philosophically respectable methodological theory on our subjectivity contained in his transcendental method and methodological idealism. First, while Kant's transcendental psychology specifies how cognitive subjects constituted *a priori* such as ourselves must think, his transcendental method is to analyze the finitude of our cognitive subjectivity itself. What this means is that Kant's method is to ask, "What is it for our cognitive subject to be finite?" Second,



Kant's transcendental idealism specifies how things must appear to cognitive subjects constituted *a priori* such as we are, and thus posits a unidirectional dependence of empirical objects upon our cognitive faculty's *a priori* constitution for their necessary structure. His methodological idealism, by contrast, posits a bidirectional interdependence of empirical objectivity and our finite cognitive subjectivity for their very intelligibility as such. What this means is that, for Kant, the answer to the question, "What is it to be a finite cognitive subject as such?" must refer to what it is to be an empirical object as such, and in just the same way as the answer to the question, "What is it to be an empirical object as such?" must refer to what it is to be a finite cognitive subject as such. In other words, on Kant's methodological idealism, empirical objectivity and our finite cognitive subjectivity are reciprocally related and co-constitutive.

I will now show how my interpretation provides for my solution to the puzzle of Kant's transcendental metaphysics. On my interpretation, Kant's transcendental method is to analyze the finitude of our cognitive subjectivity, or in other words, to answer the question, "What is it for our cognitive faculty to be finite?" Kant's answer to this question is that the finitude of our cognitive faculty consists in the dependence of our possible cognition upon objects for its objective cognitive content. For Kant, our faculty of sensibility is dependent upon objects affecting us for the singular contents of our possible intuitions, while our faculty of the understanding is dependent upon objects being given in intuition for the discursive contents of our possible judgments. Kant's methodological idealism, on my interpretation, states that our finite cognitive subjectivity and empirical objectivity are mutually interdependent for their very intelligibility as such, or in other words, that the questions "What is it to be a finite cognitive subject?" and "What is it to be an empirical object?" are questions that can be answered together and only together. Kant's answer to this latter question is that empirical objects are what our

cognitive faculty depends upon for the contents of our cognition. Empirical objects are objects of possible intuitions and of possible judgments. Here is my solution to the puzzle of Kant's transcendental metaphysics. Kant's transcendental method consists in the analysis of the dependence of our finite cognitive faculties of sensibility and of the understanding upon objects for the contents of our possible intuitions and judgments. Kant can thereby discover the metaphysical structure of empirical objects, since he conceives of empirical objects together with our cognitive faculty as what our cognition depends upon for the contents of our possible intuitions and judgments. Kant's transcendental investigation of the mind can discover the metaphysical structure of the world, because mind and world are two sides of the same coin.

I will now conclude by explaining this Kantian idea of a transcendental metaphysics is not of merely historical significance, and that its historical significance is not limited to Kant. On one hand, I argue that Kant has real philosophical insights in his conceptions of justification, objectivity, and subjectivity. While Kant conceives of justification such that our metaphysical knowledge of the world can be justified only by the metaphysical structure of the world itself, he conceives of objectivity and subjectivity as interdependently intelligible, so that the transcendental investigation of the mind can discover the metaphysical structure of the world. On the other hand, I aim to show that the Kantian idea of a transcendental metaphysics has a historical significance beyond Kant. While Kant conceives of the transcendental investigation of the mind as a direct endeavor that can be completed once and for all, Hegel and Heidegger retain the notion of a subjective self-knowledge that justifies our objective metaphysical knowledge, but they deny that our self-knowledge can be direct or ever completely exhausted. In this way, Kant's transcendental metaphysics serves as the point of origin for a tradition in philosophy that includes Hegel's phenomenology of Spirit and Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein.