

The Revolutionary Kant

A Commentary on the
Critique of Pure Reason

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The Transcendental/Empirical Distinction

In the preliminary sections of the *Critique* Kant begins to introduce his analytic apparatus, but later sections establish its role. The philosophical distinction between “appearance” and “thing in itself” is introduced in the B preface but later passages in the Aesthetic, Analytic, and Dialectic are needed to explain it fully.¹ The synthetic a priori classification is formally introduced in the introduction, but Kant’s claims for the synthetic a priori principles await their proofs in the Analytic of Principles. Similarly Kant’s related use of “transcendental” and its contrast with “empirical” are aired at B25, in a passage cited above, but do not receive the clarification they deserve until later (B80–81, B350ff.).

Put in the most general terms “transcendental” is Kant’s favored description of his distinctive philosophy. That is true even though Kant regards “transcendental philosophy” as too ambitious a project for his book, and contents himself with what he calls only a “propaedeutic” (Bxlili) and the present “transcendental critique” (B25–26). Transcendental philosophy *develops* the revolutionary new direction for metaphysics for which the *Critique* is primarily a preparation. Throughout the *Critique* Kant distinguishes specifically “transcendental,” as opposed to “empirical,” accounts of virtually all his key terms. Kant’s idealism is qualified as “transcendental” in opposition to a traditional “empirical” idealism, and central concepts such as “thing in itself,” “outer object,” “self,” “synthesis,” “psychology” and many others have both an empirical and a transcendental use. The distinction between “appearance” and “thing in itself,” required for that part of the Copernican revolution which resolves the apparent contradictions of reason, evidently can be understood either empirically or in its philosophical significance transcendently.

One of Kant’s principal complaints against Garve was that he failed to understand this distinction, confused “transcendental” with “transcendent,” and so failed to observe a distinction between objects of experience and objects of reason. It must have been an added irritation to Kant that

Garve did not even use Kant's term, but used *transcendentell* rather than *transscendental*. Contemporary commentators sometimes sympathize more with Garve than with Kant in regarding Kant's terminology as obscure or mysterious. Garve's position may be excused by claiming that Kant often uses "transcendental" when he should use "transcendent," is generally careless, even inconsistent, in using the two expressions, and never explains them adequately. Commentators, such as Cassam, sometimes explicitly avoid discussion of the terminology on the ground that it is too obscure to be disentangled,² despite the fact that it is evidently central to Kant's understanding of his project, and to his fundamental distinction between those uses of his key concepts.

Even at this early stage it is consequently useful to offer some clarification for Kant's distinction between the "transcendental" and the "empirical," even though it appeals to later passages. The distinction belongs to Kant's analytic apparatus, outlined in the introduction, even though it is a reticent part of it. In *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* (chapt. 3) I had already given some account of Kant's distinction and cited relevant passages in the *Critique* as B25, B40, B56, B62–63, B66, B80–81, B117–18, B296–98, B344–51, and B535. The passages at B25 and B80–81 particularly represent transcendental enquiries as self-consciously higher-order enquiries into the character of our knowledge and experience, both in ordinary life and in science.

Not every kind of a priori knowledge should be called transcendental, but only that by which we know that—and how—certain representations (intuitions and concepts) can be employed or are possible purely a priori. The term 'transcendental' . . . signifies such knowledge as concerns the a priori possibility of knowledge or its a priori employment. . . . The distinction between the transcendental and the empirical belongs therefore only to the critique of knowledge; it does not concern the relation of that knowledge to its objects. (B80–81)

Kant's distinction has at its center the idea of that self-monitoring scrutiny of one's own intellectual activities which Hegel and others have, pessimistically, supposed impossible (B823). For this reason, as I noted, Kant's project might be said to have an even higher order. It concerns the character of (and so has a higher order than) ordinary or scientific knowledge, but is also concerned to monitor philosophy itself, that is, to question *its* character and authority. Indications of Kant's attention to those higher-order issues about philosophy occur throughout the *Critique*, but I cite a revealing example from *Metaphysics* L₁ (Ak. 28.1.223):

It is good to determine the boundaries between sciences and to depict them in a system; otherwise we are always apprentices and know nothing; for example,

how psychology and metaphysics are related, and whether they do not involve several different disciplines. . . . The reason why metaphysics was confused with empirical psychology was that we didn't know exactly what metaphysics was, and hadn't outlined its boundaries. So much was included under the heading: First Principles of Human Knowledge.³

The passage expresses not only Kant's self-conscious monitoring of his own and other disciplines, but more particularly his awareness of potential confusions between psychology and metaphysics which he is often thought to overlook.

I had noted that in contrasting a transcendental and an empirical enquiry Kant used those technical terms adverbially rather than adjectivally. Typically Kant's transcendental accounts refer not to special transcendental objects *beyond* those presented in experience, but deal transcendently, rather than empirically, with those objects of experience and our conceptions of them. A transcendental account of such terms as "object," "self," or "synthesis" is not, consequently, a material reference to objects, selves, or syntheses *distinct* from those items in our experience, but a formal, philosophical account of our conception of those items in our experience. The adverbs indicate different ways of dealing, empirically or philosophically, with the *same* things, and Kant makes extensive use of the "formal/material" distinction in this way in the Dialectic.⁴ Metaphysics and empirical psychology may both be concerned with belief, memory, imagination, and attention, but they deal with them in, respectively, philosophical or empirical ways. That divergence does not mean that the two modes of enquiry are distinct; it is natural to think that they overlap and complement each other.

It would be natural to complain that this still does not explain the contrast unless we already understand what is distinctive in philosophy, or in Kant's new philosophy. The complaint might be answered by claiming that philosophy deals with concepts, and is distinctively "conceptual," and it was noted that in the prefaces, and elsewhere, Kant *does* claim that philosophy is conceptual. His project of "transcendental reflection" has to do with the correct allocation of our *concepts* to their cognitive sources, and more generally he discloses dependence relations among our concepts. But Kant plainly does not think that philosophy is "conceptual" in generating only analytic truth, and his use of "conceptual" consequently differs from that of recent analytic philosophers. Part of his point is to contrast philosophers, who are concerned with concepts, with formal and natural scientists, who deal with the ground floor objects those concepts designate. The point is elaborated in the Discipline of Pure Reason where Kant draws that distinction between philosophy and mathematics (B752–55).

[Mathematicians] think it unnecessary to investigate the origins of pure concepts of the understanding . . . and to determine the extent of their validity; they care only to make use of them. In all this they are entirely in the right, provided they do not overstep the proper limits . . . [and] . . . unconsciously . . . pass from the field of sensibility to the precarious ground of pure and even transcendental concepts. . . . In mathematics, on the other hand, their passage gives rise to a broad highway which the latest posterity may tread with confidence. (B753–54)

B25 makes the point clearly and explicitly in saying that transcendental knowledge is concerned “not so much with objects as with our mode of knowledge of objects. . . .”

In many of the cited passages Kant offers a further specification of distinctively transcendental interests. Ordinary people and scientists dealing with ground-floor objects in experience are interested primarily in differentiating them, and even their general theories concern restricted classes of such objects. Philosophers, by contrast, are typically concerned with more general issues about experience *as a whole*, and this is certainly true of Kant’s project of outlining the a priori structure of experience. Although the conceptual and empirical interests of metaphysics and psychology, or philosophy and science, may overlap, nevertheless philosophers’ interest in the general structure of experience, or in classifying the status of items in it, is typically on a different level from that of scientists. Scientists are not generally interested in drawing a map of the fundamental concepts in our experience as a whole, or in classifying the objects of knowledge as “appearances” rather than “things in themselves.” Kant’s interest in both of those issues is distinctively transcendental rather than empirical.

In the German philosophical tradition before Kant’s Critical philosophy the terms “transcendental” and “transcendent” were widely used to mark that interest in general issues. Recent work by Alison Laywine (2001) considers some of that earlier usage in connection with correspondence between Kant and Lambert around the time of the *Dissertation*, over the contrast between a “general” and a “special” metaphysics. “Transcendental” and “transcendent” were used to signify what was distinctive of a “general metaphysics,” dealing with knowledge as a whole, as opposed to a “special metaphysics” which dealt only with some subset of items, such as Wolff’s special metaphysics of immaterial substances. The tradition referred further back to the philosophical interest in so-called transcendental concepts such as “one, true, good” to which Kant refers at B113–16.

In that passage Kant refers to the “transcendental philosophy of the ancients” and to the “transcendental predicates” of the proposition from “school metaphysics,” “quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum.” Such a proposition qualifies as “transcendental” in virtue of its generality, but

Kant is less interested in pursuing the topics of school metaphysics than in correcting the mistakes he believes the tradition made in so classifying them. His view is that what were taken to be “transcendental predicates of *things*” were in fact nothing more than “logical requirements and criteria of all *knowledge* of things in general.” This repeats the contrast between scientific and higher-order philosophical enquiry. He goes on to argue that the omission of these transcendental predicates from his table of categories is consequently deliberate and not itself an error, but the more important point is his prior insistence on that traditional mistake. His point is that transcendental enquiries, unlike those of science, deal with our concepts and the way we know of things rather than with the things themselves. In this emphasis on the higher-order character of transcendental, as opposed to empirical or scientific, enquiries Kant both reinforces his earlier distinction and indicates a break with that earlier tradition.

One strong indicator of that break is Kant’s distinction between what is “transcendental” and what is “transcendent.” In the discussion between Kant and Lambert it seems as though no firm distinction was drawn between the terms, but it is a central aspect of the *Critique*, and a major complaint against Garve, that they should be sharply distinguished. Even if the terms were used indifferently before 1781 they are importantly separated in the Critical philosophy. That formal separation is made explicit only late in the *Critique* at B352–53 after extensive use has been made of the terminology, and long after Kant had initially explained the distinction at B25 and B80–81.

At B350–53 he rejects the idea that “appearance” means “illusion,” claims that the senses cannot err because they cannot judge, and separates empirical (e.g., optical) from transcendental illusions. He goes on:

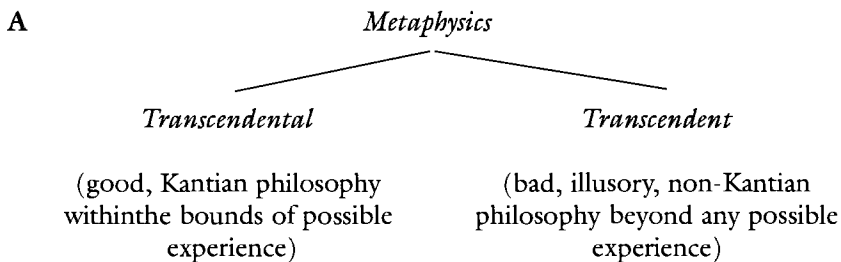
We shall entitle principles whose application is confined entirely within the limits of possible experience *immanent*, and those which . . . profess to pass beyond those limits *transcendent*. In the case of the latter . . . I mean actual principles which incite us to tear down all those boundary fences, and to seize possession of an entirely new domain which recognises no limits of demarcation. Thus ‘transcendental’ and ‘transcendent’ are not interchangeable terms. The principles of pure understanding . . . allow only of empirical and not transcendental employment, that is, employment extending beyond the limits of experience. A principle, on the other hand, which takes away those limits, or even commands us to transgress them, is called *transcendent*. If our criticism can succeed in disclosing the illusion in those alleged principles, then those which are of merely empirical employment may be called . . . *immanent* principles of pure understanding.

Kant draws a rough distinction between transcendental metaphysics, which is broadly good, and transcendent metaphysics, which is illusory, but the

detail in the account and some of the new terminology remain unclear. Kant adds the contrast between “transcendent” and “immanent” to the distinction between “transcendental” and “empirical,” and is vulnerable in the fourth sentence to the common charge that his use of the terms is inconsistent. In that sentence we might expect Kant to write, “only empirical and not *transcendent* employment.” The occurrence of such an apparent fault in the very passage which defines the terms looks at best careless and at worst confused. It may easily be regarded as a typical Kantian incoherence, but I argue that Kant’s expression is neither inconsistent nor confused. I then consider other aspects of the terminology, and indicate some errors made in trying to understand it.

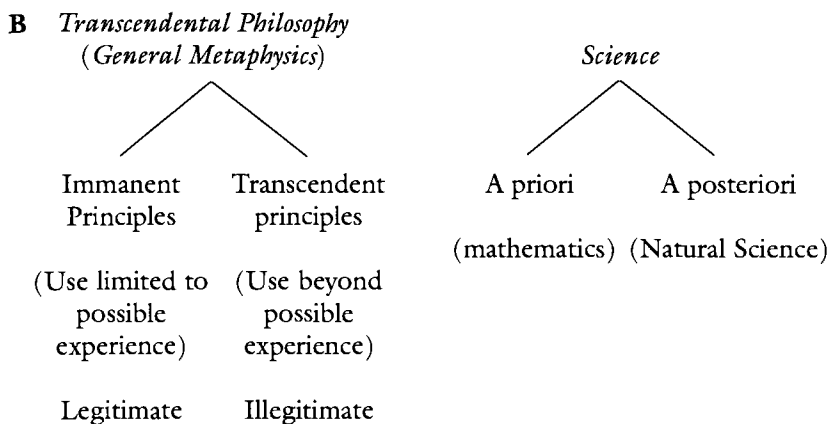
1. Transcendent and Transcendental

Kant’s account invites the two questions: How can he consistently describe “transcendental” principles as also “transcendent”? and: How can principles, so described, belong both to an approved Kantian metaphysics, and also to a bad, illusory metaphysics? That there is no satisfactory answer to these questions is entailed by the following taxonomy.



If we accept **A**, then Kant’s use of “transcendental” for “transcendent” is objectionable. What is “transcendental” is then coordinate with what is “transcendent,” so that they are then opposed as exclusive branches of metaphysics, one approved one disapproved. This scheme, which may be simply taken for granted, rightly marks Kant’s wish in the quoted passage to treat the two terms as “not interchangeable,” as not synonyms, but it does so in a way which yields inconsistency.

A, however, is not the only possible scheme, and might be replaced by an alternative, prompted by the reflection that while Kant denies that the terms are interchangeable, he does not say that they are mutually exclusive. They could fail to be interchangeable while there is a one-way entailment or implication between them, and that condition is satisfied by the following scheme.



B shows “transcendental” and “transcendent” not to be interchangeable, but does not make them exclusive. They no longer appear as coordinate and opposed sub-branches of a general metaphysics. Transcendent principles, and a metaphysics which endorses them, are a sub-branch of transcendental philosophy, but a sub-branch which for Kant is illusory. It might still have been better if Kant had written “transcendent” for “transcendental” in the fourth sentence of the B352 passage, but there is no longer any inconsistency, or even conflict, since even transcendent principles count as transcendental. I shall take it that **B**, rather than **A**, is Kant’s intended scheme.

2. Empirical and A Posteriori

I had also earlier noted,⁵ as a consequence of this account, that Kant committed himself to an ambiguous use of the term “empirical” which conceals the force of his distinction and is liable to mislead. In the passage at B80–81 Kant importantly *distinguishes* transcendental and a priori enquiries. Although transcendental enquiries, and philosophy or metaphysics in general, *are* themselves a priori in character, not all a priori enquiries count as properly transcendental or philosophical. Kant gives the example of mathematics, which is an a priori enquiry with an outcome in a priori propositions and truths, but which is not philosophy and is not transcendental. Mathematics does not have the higher-order character of philosophy and in particular provides no explanation of the *possibility* of a priori truths. Mathematics deals in a priori truths but offers no account of how such truths are possible, how they arise, or how, having arisen, they can be applied in a posteriori experience.⁶ Those further accounts belong instead to the higher-order enquiries of philosophy in which the a priori is

defined, its scope and character are outlined, and its provenance and application are explained (B753–54).

I shall use the term “provenance” to translate Kant’s *Ursprung* as an indication of his intention to classify concepts according to their cognitive sources in the project of transcendental reflection. Kant’s account of such “origins” in that project is not, as he explains, a part of empirical psychology, but belongs instead to metaphysics. The separation of his project from empirical psychology is made clear even in the prefaces, and underlined in later passages such as B118–20. What exactly Kant understands by classifying ideas as belonging to sensibility, to understanding, or to reason will be considered later in connection with his outline of transcendental reflection in the Amphiboly and in the Dialectic.⁷ The term “provenance” is useful since it indicates not merely the empirical origins of some item but something of its status as saleable or collectable. It provides salient information about, and a relevant classification of, items in a catalogue, just as Kant’s metaphysical classification does in his inventory of items in experience.

It follows from this account that Kant has two related distinctions in which the term “empirical” ambiguously figures. On one side “empirical” means “a posteriori” and is contrasted with what is a priori; on the other it is contrasted with what is transcendental and in that case *cannot* be equated with “a posteriori.” For a discipline like mathematics contains a priori truths which are not transcendental, and so in some sense “empirical,” but are a priori and not a posteriori. In one sense some “nontranscendental,” that is, “empirical,” truths may be a priori, while in the other sense what is “empirical,” that is, “a posteriori,” *cannot* also be a priori. We could note the difference by writing “empirical₁” (nontranscendental) for one opposition to “transcendental,” and “empirical₂” (a posteriori) for the other opposition to “a priori.” The term “empirical” might then have been used as a proper contrast to “transcendental” without understanding it as “a posteriori.”⁸ Although it is a fault in Kant that these distinctions are not made fully explicit, his own account of the situation shows how to remedy it. The difficulty is not substantial enough to justify the response of commentators who represent Kant’s term “transcendental” as utterly mysterious. To stop at that point is one kind of interpretative failure; it does not simply misinterpret Kant’s text but it fail even to attempt to resolve an evidently resolvable problem in the text.

One important corollary of such an account is evident if we further ask how the term “empirical₁” should be understood in its contrast with the transcendental. If it does not mean “a posteriori” what does it mean? The direct answer is that since transcendental enquiries are higher-order enquiries into the character, provenance, or possibility of a priori truths or disciplines, the contrasted “empirical” enquiries are not higher order and

do not offer any account of those aspects. They, like the conventional operations of mathematicians or natural scientists within their disciplines, pursue and develop work inside some established framework rather than raise and answer questions about such frameworks from the outside. The internal operations of mathematicians in proving theorems within some framework are, though not a posteriori, just as much “empirical₁,” that is, “nontranscendental,” as are the operations of a carpenter or an engineer in building, or theorizing about, furniture or suspension bridges.

Kant’s distinction between the empirical and the transcendental echoes in that way a general distinction between what holds true as a part of, and within, experience and what is true beyond those claims. The former will be the particular truths of some nonphilosophical discipline, or of everyday life, and the latter will be more general philosophical or metaphysical truths. What is transcendental belongs to a general metaphysics which claims to establish a priori truths going beyond the particular, and partial, truths of other disciplines. But that latter philosophical division can be understood, as Kant makes clear, in two significantly different ways, reflected in the ambiguity noted in chapter 4 of the phrase “independent of experience.” Just as “independent of experience” may mean either “underivable from experience and a priori” *or* “going beyond any possible experience and transcendent,” so a general metaphysics may be thought to canvass claims which go beyond particular scientific aspects of experience *or* to be transcendent and beyond any possible experience. We can distinguish an illegitimate, transcendent, aspiration to establish general truths wholly *beyond* our experience, and a legitimate claim to establish truths about the *whole* of our experience. Both sets of claims go beyond the particular truths of any nonphilosophical discipline, but the former generate illegitimate and transcendent, and the latter legitimate and immanent, metaphysics.

Kant’s position can be properly captured in the following *threefold* distinction:

- (1) Empirical₁ (nontranscendental) propositions which hold *within* our experience.
- (2) Legitimate, immanent, transcendental claims about the *whole* of experience.
- (3) Illegitimate, transcendent claims which claim to hold *beyond* our experience.

In Kant’s scheme the empirical₁ claims in (1) are not necessarily a posteriori; those in (2) are transcendental, but immanent and legitimate; and those in (3) are transcendental, transcendent, and illegitimate. If such a

threefold distinction is represented, as it was by Garve, as a dual contrast between the empirical, or even the a posteriori, and the transcendent, it is unsurprising that Kant's position should seem incoherent.

Failure to recognize that threefold distinction yields many serious consequential misunderstandings of Kant's position throughout the *Critique*, but in this early context I mention just one. If Kant is restricted to the dual distinction between the empirical and the transcendent, then his interest in psychological aspects of our experience is bound to seem incoherent. That interest might still be criticized if it is part of empirical psychology, but it would be as intelligible as Locke's or Hume's psychological claims. The difficulty here is that Kant himself constantly denies that his claims belong to empirical psychology, and distances his own project from that of Locke's in just that way (B118–19). If that option is rejected and the alternative is a transcendent psychology, then Kant's position becomes dubiously intelligible. It is open to the objections that transcendent psychology is a spurious, occult discipline, and that Kant officially recognizes this in denying any knowledge of transcendent things in themselves, and in rejecting transcendent psychology in the Paralogisms. Either route leads to the conclusion that Kant's transcendental psychology is an "imaginary discipline."⁹ Commentators may notice Kant's intention to distinguish the transcendent from the transcendental, but still hold that the confused term "transcendental" led him into the resulting verbal and philosophical muddles.

3. Kant and Carnap

Kant's account of the "transcendental/empirical" distinction has in this way effectively the same structure as Carnap's famous distinctions between "internal" and "external" questions, in his "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology."¹⁰ Carnap's central point is to distinguish four questions about existence and to argue that traditional ontological issues cannot be meaningfully identified with *any* of them. Carnap separates particular and general *internal* questions, and shows that neither is properly at issue in the tradition. In terms of his illustrated number and thing languages "Is there an even prime number?" would be particular and internal, while "Do physical objects exist?" would be internal and general. Internal questions in those formal and empirical languages are trivially answerable given the criteria in the language for the queried items. The tradition evidently knew those trivial answers and took its questions about existence to be not internal but *external*.

Carnap distinguishes theoretical and practical *external* existence questions, and regards the tradition as concerned with the former theoretical

issues. Practical issues arise in asking whether we can usefully *adopt* some theoretical framework, but the answers plainly fall short of a demonstration that the relevant items *exist*. The remaining theoretical external questions can typically be formulated in contrast to their trivial internal counterparts as: “Plainly numbers exist in arithmetic, but do they ‘really’ exist?” or “Evidently physical objects once existed in Lichfield market place, but do they ‘really’ exist?” According to Carnap the tradition was concerned with those external theoretical questions and yet they have never been given a satisfactory sense. In order to meet that requirement the questions need a new background framework in which the criteria for “real existence,” and for the questioned entities, are made sufficiently explicit to enable us to give an answer. Without that background the traditional questions cannot be answered because they lack that required sense. Carnap’s position has been criticized by philosophers such as Quine and Stroud, but others have argued that, understood in these terms, it is not vulnerable to their objections.

Although there are differences between Kant and Carnap, it is not surprising that commentators have sometimes appealed to Carnap’s views to throw light on Kant’s project. What Kant calls “empirical₁” is what Carnap would call “internal” operations within some nonphilosophical discipline, whether that discipline and its outcome are themselves a priori as in the number language, or a posteriori as in the thing language. What is for Carnap “external” raises a higher-order question about such disciplines, and this is what Kant calls “transcendental.” For both philosophers external or transcendental questions are typically the stuff of philosophy and are contrasted with nonphilosophical, internal/empirical₁, questions. Despite the more elaborate, non-Kantian detail which Carnap then attaches to his basic “internal/external” distinction and one substantial divergence of view, both Carnap and Kant use that generic distinction to underline something of the special, and higher-order, character of philosophical enquiry itself.

Carnap, it is true, then goes on to regard all external theoretical questions as unanswerable or even meaningless¹¹ while Kant does not. Kant agrees that some transcendental issues, specifically the transcendent, *are* empty and futile, but he does not regard even them as meaningless. Kant would doubtless be content to accept Carnap’s view that theoretical external questions have no answer unless a framework for their formulation with the appropriate criteria is available, and he would probably have accepted Carnap’s complaint that traditional philosophers had typically failed to provide that necessary framework. On the other hand Kant plainly did not accept any strictly formal requirements which Carnap might have imposed on frameworks, such as their ideal expression in some canonical form of modern logic.

The prefaces' revolutionary hostility to the previous tradition expresses a similar attitude to Carnap's belief that previous metaphysics had at least failed to make its questions clear. Kant did not accept a verificationist criterion for meaning, but, contrary to Stroud's claim, even Carnap in his paper on semantics and ontology did not appeal to that criterion.¹² Both Carnap and Kant accept a general requirement for a reputable question that accessible criteria for its answer should be available in a possible experience, but neither appeal in this context just to a verificationist semantics. Neither Carnap nor Kant wished to reject philosophy altogether; both intended that the old, and flawed, philosophy in the tradition should be reformed and replaced with a more "scientific" method. They differed over their preferred methods for a more constructive future philosophy, even though both would support appeal to the "fruitful bathos of experience" against "windy metaphysics." Carnap's preferred goal was formulation in some formal logic, while Kant's marked a wider interest in our fundamental cognitive powers. Both regarded it as a requirement for future metaphysical issues that they should be at least in principle resolvable, and both encouraged a clarity of formulation with that aim in mind. Kant's project in the *Critique* is to provide correct answers to his legitimate, revolutionary, transcendental questions.

I have indicated that a failure to appreciate the scope and significance of Kant's "empirical/transcendental" distinction leads to substantial misunderstandings of his position which will be considered later. For now I offer comments on two accounts of Kant's understanding of "transcendental" to indicate how extraordinarily divergent, and as I claim erroneous, some of these accounts are. The two accounts suggest that some of the obscurity that has been ascribed to Kant's terminology may derive more from commentators' imaginations than from Kant's text. In the Routledge *Encyclopedia* entry for Kant's transcendental idealism it is claimed baldly that "transcendental" means "having to do with our cognitive powers" (4.665). No reference is made to the higher-order character of Kant's transcendental enquiry in the passages from B25 and B80–81, or to any resolvable ambiguity in the contrast between "transcendental" and "empirical," or to the contrast with "transcendent" issues.

The basic claim is a consequence of assuming a view of transcendental idealism in which, as the entry says, our cognitive powers "create their objects by unconscious operations on unconscious stimuli" (4.665). Once that traditionalist account of "the mind making nature" has been recognized, it is not difficult to see how the definition of "transcendental" has come to be made, but it is patently mistaken. A claim such as "Vitamin C helps to improve memory in people over the age of eighty" has to do with our cognitive powers and would have consequently to be classed as "transcendental" under this rubric. Similarly what *is* explicitly transcendental for

Kant, namely an explanation for our a priori knowledge, would *not* be classed as transcendental if it made no reference to our cognitive powers but expressed a conceptual dependence like that between “event” and “cause” in the Second Analogy. The same holds of other transcendental principles, and even of an empiricist explanation of a priori knowledge which equates the a priori and the analytic.

Another recent commentator offers a completely different account in claiming that the “transcendental/empirical” distinction separates issues of meaning from questions of fact. In Bennett’s *Kant’s Analytic*, what is transcendental is said to “have to do with meaning” (23), but it is now surely clear how this subverts Kant’s intentions. Kant’s use of the term “empirical₁” as a contrast to “transcendental” does *not* mean “factual” or “a posteriori,” and Kant does not believe that his transcendental questions are just about meaning. Kant accepts that philosophical questions are “conceptual,” in the sense that they deal with concepts in the task of transcendental reflection, but he denies that they are concerned only with the “analysis” of concepts or their meanings and yield only analytic truths.

Transcendental questions are designed to elicit answers about the character, possibility, and use of a priori concepts and principles and deal with our experience as a whole. They issue in dependence relations between concepts which Kant takes to be synthetic.¹³ Kant’s conception of metaphysics in the *Critique* is quite different from that of such predecessors as Wolff or Baumgarten, or even his own pre-Critical rationalism,¹⁴ but he still thinks of transcendental issues in a reformed general metaphysics as dealing with claims about experience as a whole. There is no good reason to think that such questions are *solely* about semantics, and every reason to deny that Kant thought they were. The belief that philosophical questions necessarily concern meaning, or yield “conceptual” and analytic truths, is a twentieth-century conviction which Kant, rightly, did not share.¹⁵

The account given here in general terms is confirmed in other relevant parts of Kant’s work, and has important implications. The distinction between the transcendental and the transcendent heralds the general diagnosis, and detailed therapeutic treatment, of philosophical illusions in the Dialectic. There is an extended discussion of transcendent and transcendental immanent claims throughout the passage at B355–90, from which the earlier quotation was taken, and at B370–71 with particular reference to Plato:

For Plato Ideas are archetypes of the things themselves, and not, in the manner of categories, merely keys to possible experiences. Plato . . . recognised a higher need than merely to spell out appearances . . . in order to be able to read them as experience. He knew that reason leaps [*sich aufschwingen*] into modes of knowledge which so far transcend the bounds of experience that no given

empirical object can ever coincide with them, but must be recognised as having their own reality, and are by no means mere fictions of the brain.

Plato found the chief instances of his Ideas in the field of the practical (morality, politics, religion) . . .

(*footnote*: He also extended his concept to cover speculative knowledge. . . . He even extended it to [cover] mathematics although the object of that science is to be found only in possible experience. In this I cannot follow him, any more than in his mystical deduction of these Ideas, or in the extravagances whereby he, so to speak, hypostatised them.)

In such passages Kant reinforces his account of the distinctions between immanent, transcendent, and transcendental claims, and distinguishes a strong, speculative Platonism about mathematics, which he vehemently rejects, from a “milder” version applying to the practical fields of morals, political legislation, and theology, which he accepts. Kant replaces appeals to a speculative realm of transcendent objects with claims about the conditions which enable us to read appearances as experience, that is, to treat categories immanently as “mere keys to possible experience.”¹⁶ Kant’s transcendental metaphysics of experience as a whole still refers to the immanent “fruitful bathos of experience” rather than to the supposed transcendent objects of a “windy metaphysics.” It encourages him to replace a tradition of “proud ontology” with a more modest “analytic of concepts” (B303). In the practical, but not the speculative, context Kant makes clear that Plato has a better case, and that his Ideas are *not* “mere fictions of the brain.” The issues considered here are primarily speculative rather than practical, but later discussions of practical issues in the *Dialectic* and second *Critique* explain what is correct in a Platonic account of those practical Ideas.

erating tendency with Kant, but his conception of its structure is not the same as Kant's.

13. Among such commentators are Bennett, *Kant's Analytic*, and Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*. The former's effort to explain Kant's conception of the synthetic a priori at pp. 12–32 is discussed in chapter 3.2.2. Strawson (pp. 42–43), after a more cursory exploration of Kant's classification, concludes that "Kant really has no clear and general conception of the synthetic a priori." Strawson's primary objection to Kant's account of the classification is that it requires the traditionalist conception of the "mind making nature," that is, of minds in themselves literally creating reality. This is vulnerable to the objections that Kant offers a formally neutral account of his analytic apparatus, and that the traditionalist conception of the "mind making nature" is arguably not Kant's. Dummett, in *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, says of Kripke's conclusion: "Counter-intuitive it undoubtedly is, but it appears to follow from Kripke's arguments: something must, therefore, be amiss with those arguments" (21).

Chapter 5

THE TRANSCENDENTAL/EMPIRICAL DISTINCTION

1. The issue is discussed in the following chapters 2.3.2.2; 7.1; 9.3; 10.2.2; 21.2; 22.1; 23.2.1.1–3; and 26.4.
2. Quassim Cassam in *Self and World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 13–14, notes Kant's distinction between an "empirical" and "transcendental" self but dismisses it with the comment: "On its own . . . the repetition of qualifications like 'transcendental' and 'metaphysical' can scarcely be said to clarify matters." Barry Stroud in *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) repeats the familiar charge that "Kant sometimes slips and uses 'transcendental' where he should use 'transcendent'" (153n), and explains his difficulty in understanding Kant's transcendental enquiry by citing his "lack of facility in the transcendental mode" (167).
3. Kant makes similar comments about the correct place of psychology at B876–77. It is clear from these passages and from his attempts to distance his own enquiry from Locke's psychology in the preface and Transcendental Deduction, that the issue was important to him and that he recognized differences between his own "transcendental topic" and both empirical and transcendent psychology. The issue is discussed in chapter 14 in relation to Patricia Kitcher's *Kant's Transcendental Psychology*, and Andrew Brook's *Kant and the Mind* in which differing accounts are given of "transcendental psychology." Although I disagree with some of their views, they are both right in finding a legitimate role for transcendental psychology.
4. At B88–89 and later in the Dialectic (B353–55, B648, B518–19, B665 and elsewhere) Kant refers to an illegitimate "material" use of "formal" principles. With the passages at B186–87, B335–36, B345–46, they form a central part of Kant's diagnosis of philosophical illusion and error which is the principal topic in the Dialectic, discussed in chapter 24.
5. I had outlined part of the distinction between the empirical and transcendental in *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, chapter 3, pp. 36–43, but I had not made the comparison with Carnap's account of internal and external questions.

6. Commentators differ about the sense of such claims. It might be said that a priori axioms in some deductive system, in mathematics, “explain” the a priori truths which follow from them, but Kant would disagree. His point is that to prove Q from axioms P_1 – P_n may support the truth of Q but does nothing to explain its a priori status. This underlines the additional requirement that the explanation should be a “higher-order” philosophical account of that status which is not provided merely in doing mathematics. It clarifies the distinction between mathematics and philosophy outlined in the quotation from B753–54, and underlines the contrast between mathematical principles and metaphysical principles of mathematics in the *Analytic of Principles* (B199).
7. Kant’s contrasts between the psychological faculties of sensibility, understanding, and reason can be understood in terms of the functions each faculty represents. Sensibility particularizes items in experience, understanding generalizes or conceptualizes what is presented to sense, and reason draws inferences and represents our reasoning in enquiries. The point is made in chapter 24 and throughout the discussion of the *Dialectic*.
8. Because “empirical” is conventionally used to mean “a posteriori” it might be better not to use the former term in opposition to “transcendental,” but the alternative of opposing “transcendental” and “nontranscendental” is ugly.
9. Kant then faces the unpalatable, exhaustive alternatives of dealing either in empirical or in transcendent psychology, both of which he denies. Contemporary philosophers who sharply distinguish their own discipline from empirical psychology will then be encouraged to regard Kant’s claims as part of an unacceptable *transcendent* psychology. I argue in chapter 7.3 that this is the origin of Strawson’s complaints about Kant’s “imaginary subject of transcendental psychology” (*Bounds of Sense*, 32).
10. Much has been written about Carnap’s paper, and I indicate a few criticisms, especially those of Quine and Stroud, and defenses of the paper. Extensive references and further contributions to the literature can be found in *Language, Truth and Knowledge*, ed. Thomas Bonk, Vienna Circle Institute Library (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003). Among the central criticisms are W. V. O. Quine, “On Carnap’s Views on Ontology,” in *Ways of Paradox and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), and B. Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*. Among the defenses are Susan Haack’s “Some Preliminaries to Ontology,” *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 5 (1976), and my “Carnap’s Internal and External Questions” in Bonk, *Language, Truth and Knowledge*.
11. I argued in “Carnap’s Internal and External Questions” that external theoretical questions are not, for Carnap, irredeemably meaningless, and that the “challenge” he makes to those who wish to debate the traditional ontological issue is to develop a suitable framework within which such questions can be answered. Without such a framework to provide criteria for “external existence” the questions are for the present “meaningless” in that we have no idea how to answer them. Discussion of the issue in relation to Wright’s *Truth and Objectivity* and Frege’s *Conception of Numbers as Objects* is given in chapters 15.2.2 and 24.3.
12. In “Carnap’s Internal and External Questions” I argue that Carnap did not rely on a simple argument from verifiability to establish his conclusion that external theoretical questions are presently unanswerable.

13. Further discussion of “nonanalytic conceptual dependence” is given in chapters 20.2 and 29.
14. Martin Schönfeld’s *The Philosophy of the Young Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) outlines brilliantly the changes in Kant’s attitude to rationalism and empiricism in the pre-Critical period.
15. Even if we think of language as the primary vehicle for expressing our beliefs in philosophy, and elsewhere, it does not follow that language has sole responsibility for those beliefs. Kant evidently thinks of philosophy as “conceptual,” that is, as dealing in concepts, but he assigns responsibility for our beliefs and their a priori structure to our mental, cognitive powers. I discuss misunderstandings about Kant’s view of philosophy as “conceptual” in chapter 29, and made the general point in “Kant’s and Strawson’s Descriptive Metaphysics,” in *Strawson and Kant*, ed. H.-J. Glock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).
16. Kant’s hostility to Plato’s metaphysics and sympathy towards Plato’s moral philosophy are discussed in chapter 24.2. A key passage in the *Critique* is at B371–72 (and note). Kant’s reference to the “keys to possible experience” has been unjustifiably interpreted as a commitment to phenomenalism.

Chapter 6

THE TRANSCENDENTAL AESTHETIC

1. Kant’s 1770 *Dissertation* (Ak. 2.387) drew a sharp distinction between a “world of sense” and a “world of understanding,” and faced the problem of integrating them which became his central concern during the decade up to 1781. The famous letter to Herz of 1772 expresses the problem and testifies to its fundamental importance for the development of the first *Critique*. *Dissertation* II, §3–4:

The object of sensibility is the sensible; that which contains nothing save what must be known through intelligence is the intelligible. The former was called, in the ancient schools, phenomenon; the latter noumenon. . . . Thus on one hand all sensitive cognition depends on the special nature of the subject . . . on the other, whatever is exempt from this subjective condition refers only to the objects. It is clear, therefore, that representations of things as they appear are sensitively thought, while intellectual concepts represent things as they are.

The association of the “intellect” with intelligible objects, noumena, things as they are (in themselves), and their separation from “subjective conditions of sense” and things as they appear, indicate an earlier, and more Leibnizian, account of the two faculties and their objects than is found in the *Critique*, especially in the famous connection between sense and understanding at B75–76. There is also considerable overlap between what Kant says of space and time in the two works. In particular much of the argument supporting the *Critique*’s account of space and time as a priori and intuitive is already in the *Dissertation*. The main differences are first in the conceptions of the objects of sense and understanding or reason; and in the extensive appeal to “innate ideas” in the *Dissertation* which is rejected in the *Critique*. *Dissertation* II, §4: “there is required an internal principle of the mind through which these representations may take on a certain configuration according to stable and innate laws.” A further comment on the way these differences affect Kant’s diagnostic therapy in the Dialectic is made in chapter 24.1.4.