

On the mediate proof of transcendental idealism

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1. Introduction

In discussing transcendental idealism of space and time and the reasons why Kant adheres to it, we can think of several angles of attack. We can distinguish between the question about the origin (or origins) of this philosophical position – which is a matter of historical genesis – and the question about Kant’s proof or arguments for it – which is a matter of a systematic-philosophical analysis. An answer to the first question could treat for example of the significance of Kant’s arguments based on incongruent objects and the role of the antinomies. An answer to the second question would likely have to refer to the expositions of space and time in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* and the way in which Kant concludes, on their basis, that space and time must be transcendently ideal, or perhaps, more in general, to the specific conditions of discursive cognition.

Kant is confident that he has provided a proof for transcendental idealism in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*. Because this proof does not depend on assumptions that are only to be found in other sections of the first *Critique*, it is said to be a direct or immediate proof. Of course, inversely, the independent nature of this proof does not imply that no other parts of Kant’s critical philosophy depend on the thesis of transcendental idealism. It is, for example, impossible to understand the transcendental deduction without the more general commitment to transcendental idealism, because the critical conception of space and time is one of its fundamental premises, without which its argument would go astray.¹ This goes also for the proofs of the fundamental

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¹ Elsewhere, I have shown that one does not need a very deep exegesis of the Kantian text in order to remark the impossibility of the so-called separability-thesis, which states that Kant’s *Analytic* does not depend on transcendental idealism. See: Henny Blomme, „Die Rolle der Anschauungsformen

propositions,² which presuppose transcendental idealism of space and time, as well as for important proofs within Kant's second and third *Critiques*. It is certainly not false to state that, systematically speaking, the importance of Kant's direct proofs for transcendental idealism of space and time cannot be overestimated, since the whole building of Kant's critical philosophical project rests on them.

That said, however, in this paper I want to concentrate on another argument for transcendental idealism. Indeed, it is possible to use elements of the Transcendental Dialectic to provide a mediate proof of transcendental idealism. This is not some discovery of my own, since Kant himself uses the solutions of the antinomies as such a proof and also explicitly calls this proof a mediate one. In what follows, I do not simply want to explain Kant's argument.³ What I want to show is that a mediate proof of transcendental idealism that takes its resources from the Transcendental Dialectic needs to assume even less than what Kant took to be its premises: I will show that the nature of reason itself and the content of the general cosmological idea suffice as elements for a mediate proof. Indeed, the claim is that transcendental idealism can be mediately established on the basis of the general antinomial relation between transcendental realism and material idealism, without any requirement to refer to the particular realisations of this antagonism as they are presented in the four antinomies. If the argument is correct, it shows that the mediate proof of transcendental idealism does not depend on a sympathetic account of the antinomies. This in turn would mean that we do not have to bother too much about Hegel's sharp critique of Kant's treatment of the antinomies.⁴ Indeed, if we can advance a kind of

in der B-Deduktion“, forthcoming in: Giuseppe Motta & Udo Thiel (Eds.), *Kant: Die Einheit des Bewusstseins*, Kant-Studien Ergänzungshefte, Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2016.

² This is how I prefer to translate the “Grundsätze” that we find in the Transcendental Analytic. They are the most fundamental a priori synthetic judgments in the theoretical realm.

³ For a good commentary on the dialectic and the mediate proof as established by Kant on the basis of the solution to the four antinomies, see Heinz Heimsoeth, *Transzendente Dialektik. Ein Kommentar zu Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Zweiter Teil*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967, 287sq.

⁴ For a refutation of Hegel's critical assessment of Kant's account of the antinomies, see e.g. Martial Gueroult, “Le jugement de Hegel sur l'Antithétique de la Raison pure” in: *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, vol. 38, 1931. For a defense of Hegel's critique, see e.g. Sally Sedgwick, “Hegel's Strategy and Critique of Kant's Mathematical Antinomies” in: *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 8, n°4, 1991, 423-440 and “Hegel on Kant's Antinomies and Distinction between General and Transcendental Logic” in: *The Monist*, Vol. 74, n°3, 1991, 403-420. Insofar as, in Sedgwick's interpretation, Hegel's critique extends to Kant's conviction that the general antinomial relation between transcendental realism and material idealism calls for (a third alternative that provides) a resolution, the claim that is developed here would not be of much help when it comes to defending Kant against Hegel. But see e.g. Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 301sq. for a critique of Sedgwick's Hegel.

mini-separability-thesis concerning the specific antinomies and the mediate proof of transcendental idealism, the latter does not have to be affected if we observed that the former had been rendered philosophically weak or vulnerable.

I will start with a discussion of Kant's account of the nature of reason before I will turn to the cosmological idea and to my version of the mediate proof of transcendental idealism. Thus, in the first part, I will be following more or less closely Kant's own elucidations on the matter. The second part contains an application of the concepts and ideas discussed. I will conclude with a remark on the definition of transcendental idealism.

2. Human reason and the search for the unconditioned absolute

Kant's account of human reason is located in the Transcendental Dialectic, which he also describes as the logic of transcendental illusion. As Kant states it, this kind of illusion is a natural and incurable result of the proper functioning of human reason.⁵ Indeed, our specific human reason contains some basic rules that merely condition the use of itself, and thus are merely of subjective validity, but appear to us as objective principles. Now, transcendental illusion occurs when a subjectively necessary connection of concepts – that means: necessary in the course of the use of reason itself – is taken for an objective and necessary connection of those concepts.

The proper task or functioning of human reason is to bring our concepts under the “highest unity of thinking” (*KrV*, A298 / B355). While, as a faculty, the understanding, with the help of its proper rules, brings unity under appearances, reason is the faculty that brings unity under those rules of the understanding. To use a spatial analogy, we could say that reason is the faculty that is most remote from sensibility, its matter not being the manifold of intuition but the manifold of rules that govern the application of the concepts of our understanding to intuition. Because the task of bringing those rules under the unity of reason has nothing to do with appearances as such, it does not condition our knowledge of particular objects. But it is reason that gives us (the form of) the ideal of knowledge as a unified whole, and makes that the understanding searches to interconnect its dispersed and fragmentary

⁵ For an excellent account of the nature of transcendental illusion and the philosophical genesis of this idea in Kant, see Robert Theis, “De l’illusion transcendantale” in: *Kant-Studien*, vol. 76, 1985, 119-137.

cognitions under a single principle. While the unity of experience – at which the understanding arrives through the application of its rules – is distributive and therefore its universality only comparative, the unity to which our knowledge is directed as a whole is collective and has true universality.

To know how exactly reason aims at this and thus to find its proper principle, Kant first takes a look at the functioning of reason in its logical use. This is the use that consists in drawing mediate inferences, whereby a mediate inference is one that involves the subsumption of something that is conditioned under a general condition or rule by means of an additional condition. In relation to the cognition stemming from our understanding, this results in reason searching to construct a syllogism to ground a given judgment. In this syllogism, the given judgment is considered as the conclusion, and reason shows how to derive this specific conclusion from a more general rule – functioning as the general condition (major) of the specific judgment – by providing the specific condition (minor) that links that general rule with the more specific judgment to which the syllogism concludes.

But since also this more general rule must have its condition, reason will try to provide another syllogism in which this more general rule is a conclusion that follows from the subsumption of its specific condition (minor') under a still more general rule (major') that is now considered the general condition of the conclusion. Thus, reason will try to derive the judgment provided by the understanding from a growing series of prosyllogisms. This process of searching general rules for the subsumption of more specific conditions, if it reached at last a general rule for which no higher condition can be found – that is: if it succeeded in finding the unconditioned for the given (conditioned) judgment –, it would have succeeded in ultimately grounding that given judgment. This would mean that the given judgment or rule of the understanding, as a part of that cognition that provides distributive unity to our experience, has been successfully integrated into the collective and universal whole of knowledge, to which reason tries to direct all “matter” of the understanding.

The insight in the logical function of reason makes it possible for Kant to formulate the logical maxim by which that function must be guided: “to find for the conditioned cognitions of the understanding the unconditioned, with which its unity is completed.” (*KrV*, A307 / B364) But for this task not to be senseless, we have to suppose that such an unconditioned can actually be found. Exactly this belief, that there is an unconditioned general condition, which reason can attain in climbing

gradually up to it with the help of still longer prosyllogisms, is the source of transcendental illusion. Its principle is the actually ungrounded assumption – that is: not grounded in possible experience but merely in an ideal of reason – that: “when the conditioned is given, then also the total series of conditions subordinated one to another, that thus itself is unconditioned, is given [...]” (*KrV*, A307-308 / B364)

But a syllogism can have three forms, depending on which relation our thinking establishes in its major proposition. As we saw, for the use of reason, this major has to be a judgment provided by the understanding. This can either be a categorical, a hypothetical or a disjunctive judgment. To see how these types of judgments are linked with our thinking in general, we have to recall some aspects of the discussion in the *Transcendental Analytic*. There, the unity-function of our thinking was defined as “the unity of the action of ordering different representations under a common one” (*KrV*, A68 / B93).⁶ Moreover, it was argued that this unity-function provides both analytical (or logical) unity to different representations in a judgment⁷ and synthetic unity to different representations in the whole of an intuition. (See *KrV*, A79 / B104-105) This not only means that the unity-function can be used in two different ways, but also that the structure (or morphology) of its possible determinations will remain the same, no matter if we consider the function in its logical use or in its synthetic (or transcendental-logic) use. As we know, this structure of possible determinations of the unity-function of judgment is one that has four distinct parameters (“quantity”, “quality”, “relation” and “modality”), of which each has three possible values. It is outside the scope of this text to show how exactly we arrive at this 4x3 structure of possible determinations of the unity-function of judgment (Kant’s completeness-thesis) and how the same function that has a merely logical use can, in another use, create a transcendental content.⁸ Important is, that Kant takes the structure of the possible forms of (logical) judgments as a clue for the necessary structure of the possible kinds of synthesis of intuitions. In the light of our account of the

⁶ Since, for Kant, thinking is judging, we can call this function also the unity-function of judgment. Moreover, since the kind of judging involved here is the proper activity of the understanding, we may even call it the unity-function of the understanding.

⁷ Note that to say of the unity of different representations in a judgment that it is analytical, means not that a judgment is itself establishing an analytical unity, but that the unity established through concepts – conceptual unity – is analytic. Moreover, it is because of this analytical character of conceptual unity (unity of a series of marks that multiple objects have in common) that concepts can be linked in judgments.

⁸ I preserve here the concept of “function” for the general unity-function of the understanding. For Kant, what I call here its twelve possible determinations, are also the twelve possible “functions” of judgment (understood in the active sense of “judging”).

maxim of reason, it should suffice to consider succinctly the parameter “relation”. To find the possible values of the parameter “relation” of the unity-function of judgment in its logical use, we should find which relations it is possible to think as being expressed in a judgment. It appears that these are three: 1 / a relation of a predicate to a subject; 2 / a relation of a ground to a consequent; 3 / a relation of a whole to parts that, together, constitute that whole. (See *KrV*, A73 / B98)

Consequently, a categorical judgment supposes a distinction between, on the one hand, the concept of a subject and, on the other hand, the concept of a property. Moreover, the property is affirmed or denied *unconditionally* from the subject. A hypothetical judgment supposes a distinction between, on the one hand, the concept of a ground, and, on the other hand, the concept of a consequence. Here the consequence is affirmed or denied *conditionally*, its condition being the occurrence or non-occurrence of the ground. The disjunctive judgment supposes the distinction between, on the one hand, the concept of a whole, and, on the other hand, the concept of a part. In a disjunctive judgment, then, the whole is posed *unconditionally*, whereas the parts are only posed *conditionally*, their condition being the exclusion of the other parts.

Now, this structure will remain when the unity-function of judgment is used to provide unity to different representations in an intuition. So, the categories of relation show how synthetic unity is provided to the content of intuition, by ordering it following respectively the concepts of substance and accident, the concepts of cause and effect, and the concept of community (reciprocal causality of parts). Kant remarks that, at first sight, the link between the category of community and the disjunctive judgment is not very clear. But the concept of community supposes the concept of a whole, wherein the parts that constitute that whole are linked by reciprocal causality (that is: by action and reaction). Thus, whereas the whole is posed unconditionally, each part is conditioned by all the other parts, just as in the formal structure of the disjunctive judgment.

In the same manner as, in the *Transcendental Analytic*, the categories are found by taking as a clue the way in which the structure of the unity-function of understanding is revealed by its logical use in judgments, Kant takes the formal structure of the inferences of reason as a clue for the systematic division of the transcendental ideas. In the logical use of reason (which is the faculty of drawing inferences), the kind of relation between a cognition and its condition will determine the form of the inference, which, as we already saw, can be categorical,

hypothetical or disjunctive. When these possible forms of inferences of reason are applied to a content provided by the understanding, they will be the origin of the transcendental ideas. To know what these ideas are like, we should know how we have to characterise the proper function of reason, in taking as a clue the way in which it is revealed in the logical forms of inference. Now, the structure of the syllogism is such that, in its major, the same predicate that in the conclusion of the syllogism is restricted to a certain object is brought without restriction (that is: in its total reach) under a condition. From this Kant can conclude that the proper function of reason in such inferences is to establish universality. Therefore, when the function of reason is applied to the content of the understanding, it will bring forth the general transcendental idea of totality (*Allheit, universitas*), which is nothing else than the idea of the totality of conditions with respect to a given conditioned. Moreover, it follows analytically that this latter totality is the same as the unconditioned. So we can conclude that, when Kant says that reason brings the concepts of the understanding under “the highest unity of our thinking” (*KrV*, A298 / B355), this means that reason seeks to link the judgments of the understanding in a series of inferences, and that this is done in such a way that this judgments would ultimately find their place in a universal system of knowledge. To be really universal, this system of knowledge would have to include the totality of conditions, that is, the unconditioned, for each of the concepts involved in those judgments.

Following the kinds of relation that can be represented in the major of the syllogistic inference of reason, it is possible now to give some more specific determinations of the transcendental idea of the unconditioned (which is the transcendental idea in its most general form). Indeed, since we are here we are looking for the possible determinations of the function of reason in its transcendental application, the kinds of relation under which a content of the understanding can be represented are nothing but the three categories of relation. These determine the transcendental ideas, so that 1 / following the pure concepts of subsistence and inherence, the idea corresponding to the categorical inference-function of reason will be that of an unconditioned in the form of a subject. Now, the unconditioned subject is a subject that subsists in an absolute way and therefore is not itself a predicate of other subjects, which means that it does not belong or inhere to something other than itself; 2 / following the pure concepts of causality and dependence, the idea corresponding to the hypothetical inference-function will be that of an unconditioned in the form of a row consisting of members. Now, a row consisting of members can only be

unconditioned when its upper member – that is: the one grounding the lower members that depend on it – does not suppose a further ground or cause; 3 / following the pure concepts of community and concurrence, the idea corresponding to the disjunctive inference will be that of an unconditioned in the form of a system consisting of parts. Now, a system can only be unconditioned when the community of its parts is complete, which means that the aggregate of the parts concurring as divisions of the system does not require something else in order to be the totality of that system.

Moreover, in searching the unconditioned in this threefold way, that is: by building categorical, hypothetical or disjunctive prosyllogisms to remount to the unconditioned totality of conditions, reason provides us with the ideas for the projects of three transcendental sciences.⁹ These are the ideas of, first, a transcendental science of the soul; second, a transcendental science of the world and, third, a transcendental science of God. Here, in our search to argue for transcendental idealism from within the nature of reason, we are concerned only with the second of those sciences, which Kant simply calls rational cosmology. It is to this science and its method that we will now direct our attention.

3. Rational cosmology and its ways to an unconditioned of appearance

Rational cosmology is the science that presupposes the idea of the world as a whole. This means that it takes as its object the concept of world, understood as the totality of all appearances. This totality of appearances in turn is understood as the totality of spatiotemporal objects and events. So, in Kant's understanding, the research domain of a person whom we would call a rational cosmologist would actually be this totality of objects and events, and this person would try to gain a priori knowledge about the world understood as such. But Kant takes this idea of world to be an illusion produced by pure reason, and if the rational cosmologist believes that, after doing some thinking-exercises, she can come up with results that make us know something more about this world, she must be building on that illusion.

⁹ These sciences are transcendental in the sense that they transcend experience in search of transcendent (and not: transcendental) knowledge. But insofar as the transcendental ideas have a regulative use, they are not merely transcending experience and thus rightly are called transcendental ideas in the sense that they tell us something about the way in which we gain a priori cognition.

This is widely illustrated by Kant in his account of the four antinomies. To pretend being able to gain true a priori knowledge about the world is illusory, because the rational cosmologist who pretends this apparently does not know that the object of her study is itself an illusion. She takes the world to exist as an independent object, to which she can, as a subject, turn her rational attention, and does not see that this kind of world is an illusory product of the unity-function of reason. But it would be imprecise to conclude from the illusory nature of the idea of world that, for Kant, the world as we know it does not exist. Of course, also for Kant, the empirical world exists, and transcendental idealism really does not make any difference for the empirical scientist who wants to gain knowledge about that world. So we do not have to bother actual cosmologists who are doing research on the expansion or on the thermodynamics of the universe with Kant's Dialectic, because in most cases these cosmologists do not pretend to be able to say something about their topic without having access to empirical data that relieve from experiments or observations. The rational cosmologist however pretends to be able to say something about the universe by simply thinking about it.

But till now it is not clear in which sense Kant takes the world to be an illusion. We have seen how reason builds the idea of it, but for the moment we do not really know why this idea is illusory. It is here that the indirect proof of transcendental idealism can start. To illustrate this proof, I propose to start with an overview of some possible positions concerning the world. To do this, let us take as example the reasoning of an intelligent thinking person, who is struck by the beauty of a particular phenomenon, say the sunset above the sea, and then starts to think about it.

The first thought of this person is that, in fact, when she sees the sun going down, this is an illusion, because she knows that the earth is actually turning around the sun. She thus thinks: "In the world as it really is, the earth turns around the sun, and not the sun around the earth, as it seems to me when I am admiring this sunset. But also the way in which I see this sunset is not as it really is. I know that, looking at this sunset, the sensitive optical cells in my eye are affected by light rays. And what is really a light ray? I have read something about light rays really consisting of light waves, and in turn a light wave perhaps really being a flux of light particles. And what about the red colour of the sun? In fact I know that the sun is not really red at this moment, but that it is because of the refraction of the light through the particles of the atmosphere that only a certain range of the colour spectrum of the sun affects my eye."

In this manner, our thinking person arrives at a kind of a scientific description of the world. Our perceptions are the result of a multiplicity of physical processes, and the description of these processes gets closer to what is real than a description of our perceptions themselves. Consequently, she searches the real nature of what she perceives in such processes, and thereby builds the idea of the world as it really is. Even if any of the physical processes that she discovers seems to involve still other processes, yes, even if it seems that her inquiry cannot really achieve a definitive result in the form of all processes that are determining our experience, she still believes that she is getting closer to the world as it really is. So this person adheres to what we might call scientific realism and posits reality in the concept of a world that ultimately provides the truth about what it really is that we perceive. This makes her scientific realism a kind of transcendental realism.

But suppose that, after some time, our scientific realist starts to think it all over again. There is still something that bothers her. In particular, she is struck by the difference between what she sees and the scientific explanation of it. It seems that having to admit that the real world is not as we perceive it has a problematic consequence. And that is because, even as a scientist, it is only by ways of perceptions in the strict sense that she has access to perceptions in a larger sense. This means that even her scientific explanation of the world is ultimately based on perceptions in the stricter sense. From this again it follows that she cannot be sure as to whether her scientific explanation of the world really approaches the world as it truly is. Because every access to the world as it is in its scientific self, and thus opposed to how we perceive it, is somehow mediated by our perceptions, we cannot be sure that this scientific world in itself is not merely a subjective projection. So, by asking further, we see how our person ends up with a sceptical attitude. She has to conclude that she cannot be sure that things really are as she thinks them to be, not even when she tries to give fundamental scientific explanations of them. And with that conclusion, the real world has become unknowable and our thinker has become a sceptic.

But again, after some time, our thinker reconsiders the situation and still another thought appears to her. After having found that our perceptions do not necessarily help us to know the things that they represent as they really are in themselves, she now has an idea as to how to be able to leave the sceptical position. In fact, by recognizing that the only things we are really sure about are these perceptions, it now seems to her that our perceptions themselves constitute the only reliable reality. So she makes a radical shift and places the absolute reality in these

perceptions, thereby giving up the idea of another reality that would exist independently of us. She recognizes that perceptions are representations, but who says that the things they represent have really to be entities existing outside ourselves? In fact, she now understands that what we call matter is only the result of what our mind makes up on the basis of the representational content of our perceptions; it is not existing as something outside of us. Thinking further in this way, our person concludes that even space must not be more than an idea of our mind. So the only real things existing are ideas, and these are merely intellectual. And so, ultimately, our thinker has turned into a material (or empirical) idealist.

Let us now analyse the thoughts of our thinking sunset-admirer from the Kantian standpoint. Although our genealogy corresponds with the way in which Kant describes the link between transcendental realism and empirical idealism, whereby the latter is some kind of consequence of the former, it is not at all clear which position here should be preferred. It seems that we can actually build a sound argumentation for each of these positions, which makes the decision to defend one of the positions against the two others merely depend on subjective preferences. But since the different positions exclude each other, the only way to escape from the necessity to choose one of them is to adhere to some sort of radical cosmological agnosticism, stating that we cannot know anything about the world.

To avoid these positions and the dilemmas (or antinomies) they leave open, we can try to look at the presuppositions on which they rest. If we were able to find a shared premise, which truth can be questioned, we might be able to give a more definitive account of the problems that these positions create. We already saw how Kant had discovered the maxim of reason: “to find for the conditioned cognitions of the understanding the unconditioned, with which its unity is completed.” (*KrV*, A307 / B364). And we also saw that this maxim presupposes an illusory principle of reason, which says: “when the conditioned is given, then also the total series of conditions subordinated one to another, that thus itself is unconditioned, is given [...]” (A307-308 / B364). Now it appears that exactly this illusory principle of reason is laying at the basis of the *contraire* positions we described.

The transcendental realist asks for the conditions of our experience. For her, our experience is conditioned by the fact that it is the result of affection, and thus of the action of things outside of us on our sensorial apparatus. So, she starts to search for a series of conditions in those things outside us, which ultimately would ground our

experience. Therefore, she has to suppose that – at least in principle – the totality of these conditions can be found in the real world existing independently and outside of us. This means that the illusory assumption of the transcendental realist amounts to the idea that the unconditioned of experience is somewhere out there in the form of the totality of conditions of experience, even if their number may be infinite.

In analysing the position of the sceptic, we see that it is built on the same illusion as that of the transcendental realist. The sceptic does not think that we can have access to the unconditioned, but she nevertheless assumes that this unconditioned is given. That it is not given for us does not exclude that it might be given for some creature with better access-conditions, for example a divine intellect. So, the difference between the first and the second positions resides merely on the secondary aspect of being able or not to have access to the real world.

The material idealist also asks for the conditions of our experience. For her, since the only things we can be sure about are our ideas of perception – we can call them appearances –, we have to search for those conditions in the nature of our own mind. On this account, the unconditioned has not really to be hunted at in gaining a totality that grasps an infinite number of conditions. In pursuing a series of conditions into our inner nature, the material idealist has to end up with simply stating one particular condition as unconditioned, if she wants her position to be comprehensible at all. No matter which name she gives to this unconditioned condition (“mind”, “reason”, “conscience”, “the self”, etc...), if she is really an empirical idealist, the concept of it will express what she takes as the ultimate source of all our appearances. No matter too which more specific theories she has developed to give the right description of that concept, she will have to base them on some “final term”, which could mean for example that she conceives of our mind as *causa sui*.

The contraire positions of transcendental realism and empirical idealism can be further opposed by bringing their fundamental interpretation of the unconditioned (totality of conditions for the former, and unconditioned condition for the latter) under the table of the categories as to consider their illusory knowledge from a specific angle. Therefore, we should find those categories that can provide us with a row of conditions in its most general sense. As we saw, the concept of a row in such a general sense is the general idea of the cosmological illusion. Here we will not further follow this determination of the general cosmological idea by the categories. It suffices to recall that each group

of categories will yield a cosmological antinomy, whereby in the first we are concerned with the quanta of space and time; in the second with the real in space, that is, matter; in the third with cause and effect; and, finally, in the fourth, with the necessary and the contingent. So what comes out of this determination of the general cosmological idea are four illusory cosmological problems, each of which can be posed in a yes or no question. The first question is: Does the world have, yes or no, a beginning in time and a border in space? The second: Does matter exist of first particles (can it be infinitely divided) or not? The third: Is there a causality by freedom (and not merely causality by laws of nature) or not? The fourth: Is there, yes or no, a necessary being?

I will not discuss the details of these particular problems of rational cosmology. It was sufficient here to show that an antinomical antagonism can be established on the basis of the general cosmological idea of reason, which is that of the unconditioned understood in two ways: once as the totality of an infinite multitude of conditions and once as the unconditioned condition of the conditioned. What this makes clear, is that the indirect proof of transcendental idealism does not necessarily have to take into account the further specifications of the cosmological idea (in the form of the four antinomies) to be effective. Indeed, the general description of reason's search for an unconditioned of the appearances provides us with a sufficient base for that proof. This latter can now be established in a very simple way: 1 / Neither the doctrine of transcendental realism nor that of material idealism can give us an answer to the basic problems of rational cosmology. Moreover, we have no definitive or convincing grounds to prefer the former above the latter doctrine, although they exclude each other. 2 / The meta-philosophical position of transcendental (or formal) idealism, combined with empirical realism, provides us with a solution for the problems of rational cosmology, because we understand that these problems are illusory and based on a false assumption. 3 / There is no third alternative between the doctrines of respectively transcendental realism versus transcendental idealism and empirical idealism versus empirical realism. 4 / (from 1, 2 and 3) Transcendental idealism, combined with empirical realism is the only coherent meta-philosophical position.

4. Conclusion

Following Kant, we can define transcendental idealism as the philosophical position that states that our appearances are no representations of things in themselves, the argument for this position

residing in the contention that space and time are neither things in themselves, nor properties or determinations of things in themselves. I surmise that, on the basis of the mediate proof of transcendental idealism that we discussed above, a still more general account of transcendental idealism can be proposed. In that account it would simply be the doctrine that states that every unconditioned is an idea or an ideal. This account of transcendental idealism also entails, as a mediate consequence, the transcendental ideality of space and time, because it excludes their empirical ideality and their transcendental reality. Indeed, the former as well as the latter views of space and time have to assign reality to the unconditioned appearance, the only difference being the way in which this unconditioned reality of the appearances is interpreted. Who takes space and time as transcendental realities is interpreting the unconditioned as the totality of physical processes taking place in a subject-independent world. Who takes space and time as material “idealities” is interpreting the unconditioned as the source of an intellectual world that is void of material empirical objects.

In a famous letter from 1798 to Christian Garve, Kant writes that it was the problem of the antinomy of reason that “first awoke me from the dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason itself, in order to eliminate the scandal of the apparent contradiction of reason with itself.” (AA 22: 257-258) In the *Prolegomena*, he states that the antinomy of the cosmological idea in its transcendent use “works the most powerful of all to awaken philosophy from its dogmatic slumber, to move it to the difficult business of the critique of reason itself.” (AA 04: 338) These declarations seem not only to suggest that the indirect proof of transcendental idealism was the way in which Kant himself became convinced of its philosophical value, but also that he considered the mediate proof to offer the most pedagogical access to transcendental idealism. I hope that I could provide some evidence for the thesis that the argument for transcendental idealism can be even more pedagogically convincing when it starts from the discussion of the antinomy of reason in general, that is: from the general problem that appears when we want to think about the conditions of the sensible world as a whole.

5. References

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Abstract: Scholars who consider that the Transcendental Analytic contains the core of what Kant calls ‘transcendental idealism’ are mistaken. Indeed, Kant’s transcendental idealism of space, time and spatiotemporal objects is sufficiently proved in the Transcendental Aesthetic and does not depend on complementary claims made later on in the *Critique*. This does not mean, however, that we are allowed to subscribe to the so-called separability-thesis, which states that we can endorse Kant's views in the Transcendental Logic without endorsing the results of the expositions and arguments laid out in the Aesthetic. Nor does it mean that the Aesthetic contains the only proof for transcendental idealism. Indeed, as Kant himself explicitly recognizes, the antinomies provide the premise for an indirect or mediate proof of his position with respect to the nature of space and time. First, I analyze Kant’s argument for the claim that the production of transcendental illusion is inherent to the function of human reasoning, and therefore inevitable. I then follow the presuppositions and the argumentation of the mediate proof of transcendental idealism and argue that it has a more general validity than could be assumed on the basis of Kant’s text, because it is in its essence independent from the particular determinations of the cosmological idea in the form of the four antinomies. Indeed, as I argue, the nature of reason itself and the content of the general cosmological idea suffice as elements for a mediate proof. Thus, I claim that transcendental idealism can be mediately established on the basis of the general antinomial relation between transcendental realism and material idealism, without any requirement to refer to the particular realisations of this antagonism as they are presented in the four antinomies. If the argument is correct, it shows that the mediate proof of transcendental idealism does not depend on a sympathetic account of the antinomies and is not automatically invalidated if the proofs of thesis and antithesis are considered unconvincing.

Keywords: Transcendental Idealism, Space, Time, Dialectic, Illusion, Antinomies, Pure Reason, Mediate Proof, Empirical Realism

Received: 05/2016

Approved: 06/2016