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El autor y sus críticos

The Self and the Categories. Remarks on Mario Caimi's *Kant's B Deduction*

CLAUDIO LA ROCCA¹

Ich suche bey einem Verstande, der der Regeln bedarf,
die Kenntnis dieser Regeln selbst; dieses ist paradox.
(AA 16: 028)

Kant's Transcendental Deduction of Categories² is at the same time one of the most crucial, most obscure, and most commented texts in the history of philosophy. The three characteristics are obviously intertwined: the amount of exegesis is proportional to the obscurity, perhaps, but certainly also to the theoretical importance of the text, which founds or attempts to find a radically new sense of the apriori and in fact a model of thought that will condition the philosophy of the following centuries. The obscurity, on the other hand, at least the perceived obscurity,³ should to some extent affect the judgement of its importance, but in fact for the most part this has not been the case: interpreters and philosophers continue to feel that something decisive is at stake here, not just Kant's Copernican revolution, but a fundamental possibility of thought.

The intertwining of these factors makes any renewed attempt at exegesis of this text and of the underlying philosophical issues not only complex, but courageous and at the same time valuable. Mario Caimi has tackled this task with particular skill and with an effort at clarity that he seeks to pursue, without renouncing comparison with critical literature, with an immediate and direct focus on the Kantian text. The chosen text is that of the second draft, from 1787, of the transcendental deduction, which is thus implicitly – but for reasons that are then made explicit – assumed to be the

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² The following considerations are based on the book by M. Caimi, *Kant's B Deduction* (2014). Hereafter, I refer to pages from this book only by indicating the page number in brackets.

³ Also, by Kant, as is well known: the “Dunkelheit der transzendentalen Deduktion der Verstandesbegriffe” [“the obscurity in the Deduction of the Concepts of Understanding”] is explicitly evoked in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique* (B XXXVIII).

'best' version of the deduction, and is claimed to be "a rigorous and systematic argument" (p. 123).

The enormous difficulty of Kant's text and of the related questions does not leave much room for certainty. In what follows, therefore, I will try to limit myself to problematising some aspects of the text and of Caimi's reading in order to leave room for further clarification. I will focus on some of the most relevant issues of the text that seem to me to emerge with particular prominence from this reading and which invite further investigation.

1. The Method

A preliminary and important issue is the argumentative methodology that Kant would follow in the transcendental deduction. Caimi's proposal is that the argumentative course that Kant follows "closely coincides" (p. 11) with the philosophical method theorised from the beginning of the 1960s, the "analytical" one, which involves starting from an initially confused concept and gradually acquiring clarity and distinction until reaching a definition of the concept. It is therefore a matter of proceeding by successive clarifications of the concept, not only by identifying elements that compose it, but by adding elements that are initially unknown and that are necessary for its further clarification, leading to "syntheses of increasing complexity" (p. 12), which gradually constitute a "synthetic enrichment" (p. 14; cf. p. 60) of the initial concept.⁴ It must be said that Caimi shows in the course of his research and commentary on the text quite persuasively how a progressive clarification and enrichment of the concepts introduced actually unfolds in the transcendental deduction, until it finally reaches a maximum of complexity and at the same time clarity. I wonder, however, whether this can be identified with the argumentative framework that operates in deduction, and with Kant's actual methodological choice, and not be, so to speak, an expository effect of the development of deduction, which Caimi makes evident with great finesse,

⁴ This procedure is not to be considered 'analytical' in the sense of the analysis of concepts as a simple explication of notes, according to the idea of 'analytical judgements'; Caimi speaks as we have seen of synthetic enrichment, and also calls the method a "synthetical method" (p. 17), i.e., a "method of isolation and progressive synthesis" (p. 13). The doubt that remains is whether this method can legitimise itself as a demonstrative method, among other things because it is possible to ask where the elements that are to be first isolated and then synthesised come from. What makes such a procedure possible from the point of view of the methodology of philosophical knowledge?

according to his legal model, as “derivation from an origin first carried out step by step” (see also Henrich et al., 1984, p. 91),⁵ and thus as gradual clarification. I have this doubt for several reasons. The first is that Kant abandoned the theorisations of what he called “analytische Philosophie” after the 1970s,⁶ and with them also the perspective he called “analysis of the self” (AA 25: 10). His methodological research, which also runs through the reference to the legal argumentation of the *Deduktionsschriften*, I believe did not make him satisfied with an analytical procedure of the kind proposed as a guiding idea by Caimi, according to whom the “specific rhetorical structure” of the *Deduktionsschriften* could ultimately “account for the external wording of the Transcendental Deduction”, but would not exclude a different “logical structure beyond these rhetorical features” (p. 15). I, too, believe that the rhetorical-argumentative model of legal deductions should not be overestimated; however, it testifies to methodological research that Kant did not see fulfilled by the procedure hypothesised by Caimi.

A second reason for my doubts in this regard concerns the argumentative and demonstrative cogency that such a procedure could have, such as to support the weight of the transcendental deduction and with it the Copernican revolution and the foundation of transcendental idealism. Can a development of the indeterminate concept of “combination in general” (p. 14), even carried out with the extraordinary conceptual penetration that Kant can bring to bear and that Caimi masterfully reconstructs, achieve the argumentative purpose of legitimising the *a priori* validity of the categories? Might not instead a reference to Kant's explicit methodological reflection in the *Critique of Pure Reason* itself be appropriate, as I try to suggest below?

2. The Apperception

The observations just made are perhaps not without connection to those concerning the real heart of transcendental deduction, the notion of apperception, from whose critical development the whole argument seems to derive after all. If we move from the methodological aspect to the content of

⁵ Henrich, as is well known, emphasises the distance between the legal procedure of deduction, which Kant would take, and a syllogistic derivation. I believe there can be a similar distance from an ‘analytical’ procedure.

⁶ Kant maintains an analytical approach up to the *Reflexionen* of the *Duisburg-Nachlass* (cf. Klemme, 1996, p. 130).

the deduction, we find the principle of apperception, whose role is of course evident, but which Caimi emphasises in a particular way: “the rhetorical and logical structure of the Deduction is supplied by this principle, as it will unfolded and synthetically enriched along the exposition” (p. 20). The principle is initially reached through a path that moves from the notion of thought as a combination: this involves the concept of the manifold and its unity, and therefore of the “qualitative supra-categorical unity” (p. 20) that constitutes the unity of experience, which is founded on apperception. It is therefore necessary to focus on the conceptual profiles and argumentative role of apperception, and Caimi devotes the greatest attention to this.

Two aspects, which are obviously connected, must be emphasised: the nature of transcendental apperception as an operation of the understanding and its role as a concept in the argumentative structure of deduction. As Caimi shows, the first formulation of the principle (“It must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all my representations” [B 131/132]) is then made more precise in its meaning: ‘accompanying’ is not a simple co-presence of one entity with another, but means “that the manifold of intuition must be brought to unity by means of a synthesis”, in which “all the scattered elements of intuition are gathered together by virtue of their being the content of the Self’s thought” (p. 27, note 21). What, in turn, does it mean that the manifold is the content of the Self’s thought? At the origin of Kant’s conception – and at the beginning of his argumentative path – there is the idea of judgement as the union of subject and predicate *in a consciousness*: the unification of elements in judgement (Kant reminds us that this may not only be categorical judgements) means that there is an operation of unification of a subject that recognises its objective unity. How does this operation take place? This is perhaps the truly decisive point here: an objective sense of unification is implicit in this operation of unification (it implicitly attributes, implicitly recognises an objective sense to the judgement; this makes it, in Kantian terms, a judgement of experience and not of perception); the subject would be able to attribute this sense insofar as it would reflexively recognise as necessary the rules through which it has effected such a unification. The self-consciousness at stake is consciousness of the rules of unification, and it is this that grounds the identity that Kant asserts between understanding, self-consciousness and categories. Caimi clearly emphasises this point, which is never sufficiently emphasised, and from which one often struggles to radically draw all the consequences. Stressing this character of self-

consciousness raises, among other things, the problem of the real nature of such reflexive acts. I will try to explain one point and the other better.

It is clear – and Kant insists on this sufficiently – that the ‘I’ of transcendental apperception is not the empirical ‘I’, the ‘me’ of each of us. Caimi refers in this context to the terminological distinction Self/myself (pp. 23ff.). The unity of the empirical self is weak and always in question, that of transcendental apperception is instead the foundation of the unity of experience. The moment Kant ends up abandoning a view of the ‘I’ as substance, the reason for attributing unity and identity to the ‘I’ must be found again and, if this search succeeds, identified in something other than its substantial nature. Even before the *Critique*, Kant reads the ‘belonging’ to a consciousness – previously conceivable precisely as the afferece of accidents to a pre-subsisting substance – as the reference to an identical set of rules of unification⁷ that operate in a synthesis of the multiple of intuition; conversely, the ‘I’ itself is seen, so to speak, as nothing more than the reflection and “recoil” of the operation of unification. There are many expressions of Kant that go in this direction, that is, in a direction that, as it were, excludes a preliminary subsistence of the ‘I’ that precedes the unfolding of experience.⁸

I wonder if we can take this a little to the extreme for the sake of further clarity and say – even against some of the ways in which Kant expresses himself⁹ – that the identity of the ‘I’ of which one is aware in knowing is not the identity of a subject that can be conceived of as an ‘entity’, i.e. something that has a subsistence other than the consciousness of the rules of unification of *objects* that make experience itself unitary. In a *Reflexion* of

⁷ Cf. AA 23: 19, where the *gehören* to apperception is seen to be possible only through a transcendental synthesis (here still of the imagination) and its ‘functions’ and essentially identified with it; the understanding is referred to as the *Grund* and *Qvell* of rules.

⁸ “This thoroughgoing identity of the apperception of a manifold which is given in intuition contains a synthesis of representations, and is possible only through the consciousness of this synthesis” (cf. B 133 [I use for the first *Critique* the English translation in Kant 1998]). But the expression in A 108 is also very clear: “For this unity of consciousness would be impossible if in cognition of the manifold the mind *could not become conscious of the identity of the function (sich der Identität der Function bewußt werden könnte)* by means of which this manifold is synthetically combined into one cognition”; “for the mind could not possibly think of the identity of itself in the manifoldness of its representations, and indeed think this *a priori, if it did not have before its eyes the identity of its action (die Identität seiner Handlung vor Augen hätte)*, which subjects all synthesis of apprehension (which is empirical) to a transcendental unity” (my emphasis).

⁹ “Dieses reine ursprüngliche, unwandelbare Bewußtsein will ich nun *die transzendente Apperzeption* nennen” [“This pure, original, unchanging consciousness I will now name **transcendental apperception**”] (cf. A 107).

the years 1779-83, which Caimi recalls, this is expressed in an icastic way: paralogisms arise from a misunderstanding, a transcendental subreption, whereby what is the unity of the consciousness *of objects* is mistaken for something else:

our judgment *about objects and the unity of consciousness in it* is held for a perception of the unity of the subject. The first illusory appearance is that in which the unity of apperception, being subjective, is held for the unity of the subject *as if the latter were a thing* (AA 18: 223; Caimi, 2014, p. 24, note 16).¹⁰

This may seem to be a matter of nuance, but I wonder whether this point is expressed clearly enough if one says, as Caimi does after expressing very well the dependence of self-consciousness on the operations of producing synthetic unity in objects,¹¹ that “in turn, this identity *must be presupposed beforehand* if particular, determined syntheses are to be performed and if it is to be possible to have particular thoughts” (my emphasis). Caimi emphasises shortly afterwards with exemplary clarity that there is a “mutual dependence of the identity of the Self and the synthesis of representations, for it is precisely the synthesis of the manifold that makes possible the thought of the identity” (p. 28), he then speaks of “reciprocal dependence”. Once this aspect is particularly emphasised, however, one can further question – and the question is not only addressed to interpreters, but I would say to Kant himself – how transcendental apperception is to be more closely conceived. In particular, one can further question to what extent expressions that refer to representations belonging to an ‘I’ (representations as ‘mine’) are adequate or merely provisional formulations.

When the ‘I’ of apperception begins to emerge, looming in the background of the abandonment of the ‘I’ as substance, it is conceived as an anonymous subject, apperception as “the perception of oneself as a thinking subject in general (*überhaupt*)” (*Refl.*, 4674, AA 17: 647). The idea, so central, of judgement as a unification in a consciousness arises together with

¹⁰ This very peculiar character of apperception explains Kant's considerable uncertainties about its ontological status, the meaning of its ‘existence’ (cf. Caimi, 2014, pp. 94ff.).

¹¹ “[S]ynthetical unity is the ground upon which the thought of identity in self-consciousness is possible” (Caimi, 2014, p. 27, note 21). According to Barale (1998, pp. 358ff.), the concept of *numerische Identität* of self-consciousness, present in Deduction A, is an inadequate and equivocal concept.

this idea of an almost impersonal subject: “The representation of the way in which different concepts (as such) belong to a consciousness (in general, not just my own) is judgement” (AA 16: 633, *Refl.*, 3051 (1776-1779)); judgement is “the representation of the way in which different concepts belong objectively (to each) to a consciousness” (AA 16: 634, *Refl.*, 3055).¹² Once this character I have called ‘impersonal’¹³ of apperception is emphasised, however, the problem of its relation to the acts actually performed by a subject, and that of the nature of these acts, becomes more acute and complicated. The transcendental I is not a psychological subject, its necessity is not that of a fact, but that of a fundamental possibility: this is the sense of that *können* that Kant inserts in the first formulation of the principle in B 131/132, “It must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany (*muss begleiten können*) all my representations”. Kant insists on this in several passages;¹⁴ the ‘I think’ indicates a structural possibility, i.e., a set of conditions: “As my representations (even if I am not conscious of them as such), they must conform to the condition under which alone they can stand together in one universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not without exception belong to me” (B 132-133, my emphasis). The possibility – not the fact – that I consider representations to be mine (that I can always transform a judgement ‘x’ into ‘I think x’ and that I can also say ‘I think x and I think y’) refers back to certain conditions, it is, so to speak, the *ratio cognoscendi* of these conditions, which are constituted by the unification operations regulated by the concepts of the understanding.

If the above can be said, to push the reading of the ‘I think’ in this direction of a pure possibility that reveals conditions, thus in a sense that is very strident with that normally associated with the idea of self-consciousness – of course I wonder if this can be done – the question of the nature of self-consciousness that would be at stake here is or remains open: we should ask *us of what and in which sense the subject is actually conscious* at the moment

¹² Cf. *Refl.*, 5923, AA 18: 385-387, where the “objective unity of the consciousness of given concepts” coincides with “the consciousness that these *must* belong to each other and through this designate (*bezeichnen*) an object”.

¹³ Caimi points out how the ‘personal’ aspect is also outside the argumentative focus of the deduction: “the main concern of this part of the Deduction is to expound the said function of unity rather than to explain anything about the “I” as a person” (p. 28).

¹⁴ “[S]o is all combination, *whether we become conscious of it or not*, whether it be a combination of the manifold of intuition, or of several concepts [...] an act of the understanding” (B 130, my emphasis); in B 131, note, he speaks of “the synthesis of this (possible) consciousness”; cf. B 134, note: “only by means of an antecedently conceived possible synthetic unity”; A 113: “All possible appearances belong, as representations, to whole possible self-consciousness”.

in which transcendental apperception is *self*-conscious, operating in the constitution of experience.¹⁵ I think these aspects need to be problematised for a reading of Kant and transcendental deduction that does not take unclear assumptions for granted.

What sense can it make that the 'mind' (*Gemüt*) has – must have – “before its eyes” the identity of its action as a condition of its identity, as Kant writes in the 1781 version of the deduction? (cf. A 108, the passage quoted above at note 8). I do not believe that this can be interpreted in a psychological or even a psychological-like sense, as if the transcendental 'I' were performing an operation analogous to that of the empirical 'I' when it 'observes' itself in the internal sense. To have before it the identity of operations – the operations of constructing “the unity of the history of experience”¹⁶ – can probably mean that the subject constantly follows the same rules of unification, that it continues to attribute identity, quality, persistence, causal relations to the multiple (in short, to apply the categories)¹⁷ assuming those rules as discriminators between what is objective and what is not. The subject is, Kant writes, “conscious of the identity of the function, through which it connects this [the manifold] into a knowledge” (A 108, my emphasis) (and only on this basis and secondarily of the *Identität seiner selbst*).¹⁸ It is this kind of awareness, all aimed at the recognition of an

¹⁵ I believe that the Sartrean reading of transcendental apperception in *The Transcendence of the Ego* is particularly stimulating in this sense and goes in the direction of the concerns I am trying to express: “The problem of critique is a *de jure* problem: thus Kant affirms nothing about the *de facto* existence of the ‘I think’. He seems, on the contrary, to have clearly seen that there were moments of consciousness without an I, since he says: ‘it must be possible (for the “I think” to accompany, etc.)’. The real issue is rather that of determining the conditions of possibility of experience. One of these conditions is that I should always be able to consider my perception or my thought as *mine*; that is all. But there is a dangerous tendency in contemporary philosophy [...] which consists of turning the conditions of possibility determined by critique into a *reality*. This is a tendency that leads some authors, for instance, to wonder what ‘transcendental consciousness’ may actually *be*. If we formulate the question in these terms, we are naturally forced to conceive of this consciousness—which constitutes our empirical consciousness—as an unconscious” (Sartre, 2004, p. 2). We return to this last consequence later. It should be noted that in Kant the problem of the relationship between impersonal (or ‘pre-personal’, cf. p. 4) and personal consciousness cannot be evaded. The capacity to say ‘I’ is the foundation of personality.

¹⁶ Caimi refers on several occasions (cf. p. 56) very suggestively to Kant’s expression in B 114 where he compares the qualitative unity to that of *Schauspiel, Rede, Fabel* (play, speech, fable).

¹⁷ The possibilities based on categories are to be able to indicate a distinguishable unity; to be able to indicate a positive quality; to be able to re-identify something with respect to variations in its state; to be able to identify something with respect to its place in a relation of succession and co-existence (cf. La Rocca, 1999, p. 124).

¹⁸ See also a formulation such as that in A 103, according to which consciousness only emerges from the ‘effect’, from the unified manifold, and not directly: “this consciousness may often only be weak,

objective history of experience, and not at all at the subject itself, that Kant can legitimately evoke. That *allows* different and successive states of consciousness to be identified as 'mine' but does not *consist in* this identification.¹⁹

If it is legitimate to insist on this as a basic trait of the Kantian notion of apperception, then the problem of the relationship with cognitive operations that take place *de facto*, which necessarily have a 'psychological' or otherwise factual nature, arises with particular complexity. Is what is theorised as a condition of possibility in the transcendental deduction an "implicit knowledge" that deduction transforms on the philosophical level into explicit knowledge? Can we refer for the synthesis of experience to a "natural and spontaneous reflection",²⁰ and what character does this have? I believe that these questions must be asked if one is to attempt to further account for transcendental apperception and the way it intervenes in transcendental deduction. Particularly if one wants to clarify the question I posed earlier about the sense in which one can speak of self-consciousness. Kant undoubtedly refers to forms of knowledge and reflective knowledge (metacognition) that we can call in contemporary terms 'implicit'. He does so by talking about the process of *Überlegung*, to which Henrich refers, or the so-called *vorläufige Urteile* (provisional judgments). However, *Überlegung* is not a necessary and inevitable operation,²¹ even though "we cannot and should not judge on anything without reflection" (*Logik*, AA 09: 76). Instead, transcendental reflection can be, if seen not only as a philosophical operation, but as a cognitive function that is intertwined with the categories (cf. La Rocca, 1999, pp. 143ff.).

so that we connect it with the generation of the representation only in the effect, but not in the act itself (*in der Wirkung, nicht aber in dem Actus selbst*), i.e., immediately".

¹⁹ As I said before, the possibility of self-attribution (the ability to consider representations 'mine') is grounded in transcendental apperception and is, so to speak, its *ratio cognoscendi*, but it is not transcendental apperception.

²⁰ "The awareness 'I think' is precisely the self-consciousness that can be attached to natural and spontaneous reflection" (Henrich, 1989, p. 45). "Since reflection is a permanent, albeit implicit, knowledge, and investigation is a deliberate undertaking on the part of the philosopher, there remains a gap between these two cognitive activities, regardless of the essential correlation between them. Thus the question arises as to how an implicit knowledge can be transformed into an explicit one" (cf. Henrich, 1989, p. 44).

²¹ Contrary to Henrich's assertion that "reflection always takes place" (Henrich, 1989, p. 42), reflection – at least in one of its possible senses, the one Henrich uses of an operation of natural consciousness – may not take place (this is precisely what happens in the case of prejudice). It is a metacognitive condition of correct cognitive processes, not of every cognitive operation (cf. La Rocca, 2003, pp. 104ff.).

That 'implicit' operations of the understanding, which we can perhaps more properly call unconscious, are possible, and that they are real, is certainly compatible with Kant's text and consistent with its theories. Several expressions in the deduction texts themselves point in this direction, and in general Kant argues for the possibility of unconscious intellectual activities (cf. La Rocca, 2007; 2008). The problem that thus arises, if we assume the existence of 'implicit' operations as the essence of transcendental apperception, and at the same time the non-psychological character (the character of "conceptual structure") (Guyer, 1989, p. 65)²² of transcendental synthesis, is once again the sense of awareness inherent in the idea of I think, which does not seem elusive. Despite the fact that it can be said that no psychological assertion is at stake, and that Kant's statements "describe only general and, as far as they go, conceptual truths about any representing or cognitive systems, human or otherwise, that work in time" (Guyer, 1989, p. 58), the role that Kant attributes to the *Radikalvermögen* of apperception and to the function of self-consciousness is undeniable and must be placed at the centre, as Caimi does, of the argument of transcendental deduction. It does not seem possible to reduce it – at least in the way Kant develops it – to the truly minimal form of a system that interprets its current state as conforming to a constant rule (Guyer, 1989, p. 68). What is properly at stake here and how can apperception play the role of foundation?

3. The Self and the Deduction

In the analysis of the first paragraphs of the transcendental deduction Caimi identifies a path from the conditions of combination to the concept of the unity of consciousness and from this to the identity of self-consciousness. This emergence of the Self is parallel to the emergence of the idea of a reciprocity

²² Guyer very pertinently interprets categories as epistemological conditions, as "a basic constraint on any system for synthesizing data that are only given over time" (1989, p. 65, cf. p. 68: "any cognitive system working in time"), of which not the reality but the *availability* is essential: "Kant is not interested in postulating the actual occurrence, whether faintly or vividly apperceived, of any act of interpretation, but is rather insisting only upon the availability of concepts by which the interpretation of the present representational state of the knower could be justified" (p. 66). It would not be necessary, according to this reading, "that any actual assertion of a knowledge-claim must be preceded or accompanied by some datable act of mental processing that literally tokens the rule" (p. 67). I believe that this possibility of understanding the categories in a non-psychological sense (although at times it seems "as if Kant simply wishes to fudge the distinction" [Guyer, 1989, p. 66]) goes in the correct direction, nevertheless it does not allow one to evade the problem of the meaning of self-consciousness and its argumentative role, which Guyer does not address here. This point is also the limit of the analogy with a cognitive system such as the computer.

between the identity of the subject and the unity of experience, which Caimi highlights very well and very clearly:

The reciprocal conditioning of identity of consciousness on the one hand and the given manifold on the other has thus been the ground of the supreme principle of understanding, the principle according to which the entire manifold of given representations must be referred to the unity of apperception (p. 35).

I believe we can also insist on the role of this reciprocity in relation to the argumentative structure of deduction and in relation to the problem of the role of the self as such.

The interpretation of the method of transcendental deduction proposed by Caimi is all the more interesting in light of the fact that that interpreters have often insisted on Kant's lack of clarity regarding the methodology of transcendental philosophy, in spite of the constant and highly relevant centrality of the methodological problem in his philosophy.²³ However, methodological considerations referring to transcendental philosophy cannot be said to be lacking in Kant, and they have space in the *Critique of Pure Reason* itself, however unsatisfactory and elusive they may be.²⁴ To one of these I would pay particular attention. After emphasising, in the *Discipline of the Methodenlehre*, the fundamental distinction between mathematical knowledge, which proceeds by construction, and philosophical knowledge, which is discursive and proceeds only by concepts, Kant adds a further important clarification regarding the latter. The nature of an *a priori* concept is such that "no determining synthetic proposition but only a principle of the synthesis of possible empirical intuitions can arise from it" (A 722/B 750). This undoubtedly relates to what we can call its pre-philosophical use by the understanding. This clarification of the nature of *a priori* judgements in their concrete operation in experience, which signals their radical heterogeneity with respect to all other types of concepts, is already fundamental in itself. But also important is the metaphilosophical consideration about the

²³ Henrich speaks of "Kant's reluctance to present explicitly his philosophical methodology" (1989, p. 44). On the issue more generally see La Rocca (2013; 2015).

²⁴ Up to the paradoxical statement: "Of the special method of a transcendental philosophy, however, nothing can here be said, since we are concerned with a of the circumstances of our faculty – whether we can build at all, and how high we can carry our building with the materials we have (the pure *a priori* concepts)" (A 738/B 766).

propositions of transcendental philosophy that represent the philosophical explication of the operation of the understanding that takes place in experience. These propositions, although they consist of purely conceptual knowledge, are not implanted in a purely conceptual argumentative procedure. In Kant's words: "now all of pure reason in its merely speculative use contains not a single direct synthetic (*direktsynthetisches*) judgement from concepts" (A 736-737/B 764-765). An *a priori* possible synthetic judgement, of the kind contained in the Analytic of Principles, a *transzendentaler Satz* (A 722/B 750), is not a *Lehrsatz*, but a *Grundsatz*. This means that one can only arrive at them argumentatively on the basis of a presupposition, an assumption that is not derived from concepts. Kant speaks of it in these terms:

through concepts of the understanding, however, it [the pure reason] certainly erects secure principles, not directly from concepts, rather always indirectly through the relation of these concepts to something contingent, namely *possible experience*; since if this (something as object of possible experience) is presupposed, they are of course apodictically certain, but in themselves they cannot even be cognized a priori (directly) at all (A 737/B 765).

One may ask, considering this assertion, what degree of legitimation of experience can be given by concepts that presuppose it, or rather – the levels must be carefully distinguished²⁵ – what kind of philosophical foundation of the objectivity of experience can be offered by an argument that seems to present itself as circular. Kant anticipates this objection and does not shy away from this consequence, instead making it the subject of an explicit statement: we are dealing with *Grundsätze* and not *Lehrsätze*, and precisely for this reason with a synthetic *a priori* judgement: "although it must be proved, it is called a principle and not a theorem because it has the special

²⁵ As I am insisting here, it is advisable not to confuse, on the one hand, categories as functions that intervene in any case in the common construction of experience (without any need to be theorised or known as such: anyone can make a causal argument without having any notion of the principle of causality, just as one can apply logical laws without knowing them: experience has always been possible without knowing the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*) and, on the other, their philosophical explication-theorisation, which takes place in the critique of reason and must follow its argumentative procedures. To put it this way: the necessity of the categories of experience does not have to be the subject of a necessary argumentation.

property that it first makes possible its ground of proof, namely experience, and must always be presupposed in this" (A 737/B 765).

In reality, this is not a circularity, but rather a reciprocity: the transcendental conditions make experience possible, the latter – the reference to it – is the basis of demonstration²⁶ of the transcendental conditions insofar as these are exhibited as its conditions. The conditioned refers back to its condition and this makes the conditioned possible. This relation of reciprocity is not a circular implication, yet it can give insight into the logic of transcendental deduction and the role of the principle of self-consciousness in it. Indeed, I wonder whether the way the reference to this principle works from an argumentative point of view does not have this same structure: if experience is admitted (if there is to be experience) then its conditions must be admitted, which turn out to be the categories, which turn out to be conditions of self-consciousness in its non-empirical-personal, but transcendental sense. Experience, then – understood as the regulated objectivity of the empirical world (the unitary history of experience) – assumes *the same status of certainty as self-consciousness*: its 'objectivity' is not derived from concepts, in this sense deduced *a priori*, but ends up being unable to be questioned without questioning the very possibility of self-consciousness. The argumentative result of the transcendental deduction is to exhibit this very close relationship of mutual implication: not, so to speak, a kind of '*a priori* consecration' of experience against the Humian sceptical doubt, not an '*a priori* derivation' of experience, but the establishment of a bond of interdependence between self-consciousness and experience, whereby they *simul stabunt vel simul cadent*. The 'necessity' of the categories, so crucial for the transcendental deduction, is this kind of 'relative' necessity, so to speak. Kant does not propose an 'axiomatic' derivation from above, as much earlier philosophy yearned to do, but an

²⁶ The term *Beweisgrund* found in the quoted passage is also taken up in the *Prolegomena*, in which Kant reiterates the foundational character of possible experience as that which 'discovers' the possibility of *a priori* knowledge: "Notice must be taken of the ground of proof (*Beweisgrund*) that reveals (*entdeckt*) the possibility of this *a priori* cognition" (AA 04: 308; English translation in Kant, 2004); later Kant speaks, in analogy with the *Methodenlehre*, of a "spezifisch eigenthümliche Beweisart" of the categories: "From this there follows then secondly a specifically characteristic way of proving the same thing: that the above-mentioned principles are not referred directly to appearances and their relation, but to the possibility of experience, for which appearances constitute only the matter but not the form; that is, they are referred to the objectively and universally valid synthetic propositions through which judgments of experience are distinguished from mere judgments of perception" (AA 4: 308-309).

argumentation, that is “weaker”, if it is possible to call it that, but sufficient to achieve its demonstrative purpose.

If this is the case, the argumentative sense of the reference to self-consciousness perhaps stands out better: it does not refer to the occurrence of a factual self-conscious act, but rather to the structural possibility of transforming every judgement ‘x’ into ‘I think x’. This possibility, which cannot be denied, ends up providing a corresponding indubitability to the conditions of objectivity of experience, to the categories. The sense of the ‘I think’ is not Cartesian (it is not that of demonstrating the existence of an entity, as the difficulties that Caimi well points out of defining an ontological sense to the ‘I think’ demonstrate);²⁷ the reference to the ‘I think’ as a principle has the function of binding self-consciousness and experience in a community of destiny, so to speak, so that whoever wants to deny the objectivity of the latter must deny the possibility of the former, and this is more difficult:

The I think must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something be represented in me that is not thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least be nothing for me (B 131-132).

Rather than in a *cogito ergo sum*, the meaning of transcendental deduction lies in a *cogito ergo res sunt*, as Émile Boutroux (1926, p. 94) effectively wrote.

As I said, Caimi carefully insists on this reciprocity. Emphasising the above, I do not think it contradicts his idea of a progressive clarification of the sense of the principle of apperception that takes place in transcendental deduction; I only wonder whether its argumentative structure might not, however, be the peculiar one theorised in general in the *Methodenlehre* for transcendental propositions, rather than a simple procedure of analysis and conceptual enrichment.

²⁷ On the non-Cartesian sense cf. Caimi (2014, p. 21) and my “Soggetto e sostanza” (2003, pp. 27-52).

4. The Operations of the Transcendental Ego

There remains the question, as noted above, of the nature of the operations of application of the categories that are performed by the transcendental Ego and that constitute it as such. The delicate point is to maintain their non-psychological character, and at the same time not to limit ourselves to assuming them as conceptual structures in which the sense of *self-consciousness* disappears. If, as Caimi writes, we can for instance “represent to ourselves each single action of the imagination regarding this concept as being a necessary element of the one and same complex action, as if each step of the action necessarily ensued from the concept ruling this action” (p. 82), what kind of ‘representing to oneself’ is at stake here? What are we actually doing?

It is not easy to conceive of this as the performance of explicit reflexive acts by the common pre-philosophical consciousness.²⁸ On the other hand, the tout court identification of these categorical operations with implicit or unconscious operations²⁹ makes it extremely problematic in which sense one can speak of *Selbstbewusstsein* and an act of ‘representing to ourselves’. I wonder – here, too, I intend above all to pose questions and raise questions – whether the answer might not lie in the direction of an in-depth examination of the nature of the categories and the *a priori* ‘knowledge’ that arises from them, of their cognitive sense, which emphasises, with Kant, but more sharply than Kant does, their completely *divergent* character from that of ‘normal’ cognitive propositions. Kant on the one hand is often very clear about this heterogeneity, but on the other hand he moves in a parallelism of the *Verstandesbegriffe* with ‘normal’ conceptuality that ends up obscuring it again.

The heterogeneity of the pure concepts of the understanding and the corresponding judgements lies in their not properly giving rise to (or being) ‘propositions’, or not being able to be conceived as such at the moment they operate. If their enucleation in the transcendental philosophy exhibits them as

²⁸ “Es giebt einen Gebrauch des Verstandes und Vernunft vor der Kenntnis der Regeln: dies ist der Gebrauch des *Gesunden* Verstandes. Von ihm können Regeln abgeleitet werden, wie grammatic” (“There is a use of understanding and reason preceding the knowledge of the rules: this is the use of the *good* sense. From it rules can be derived, as grammatic”) (cf. *Refl.*, 1581, AA 16: 024).

²⁹ Which may possibly be understood in analogy with sub-personal neurophysiological processes, “processes of which we are *not* conscious at all while we are enjoying the conscious experience that depends upon them” (Strawson, 1989, p. 76).

transzendental Sätze (A 720/B 748), as we have seen, Kant at the same time says that their nature is not that of a “determining synthetic proposition”, but only of a “principle of synthesis” (A 722/B 750). I believe that this peculiar nature³⁰ of them (functions, rules, not assertions) can be seen together with the particular character of their apriori nature, which Kant is keen to emphasise and Caimi well remembers, when he wants to distinguish them from innate knowledge, with the theory of *ursprüngliche Erwerbung* (original acquisition) and the related analogy with “epigenesis”. Categories in their operation are never *knowledge* that we have *before* we experience, but logical functions that are only active, so to speak, at the moment when we are performing first-level knowledge, i.e., empirical assertions about the world of experience. In this sense they are “originally acquired”: we have no consciousness of them before we use them (as would be the case for innate knowledge), and the way we are conscious of them is quite analogous to the way we are ‘conscious’ of formal logical laws, i.e. *through the impossibility of not using them*: the consciousness of their necessity is *indirectly* revealed in following them at the moment we are performing empirical knowledge. Epigenesis’ lies in their not being ready-made (pre-formed) in the manner of ‘known’ propositions, but in only becoming effective in the realisation of experience as conditions. In this sense, it seems to me that the exegesis of the metaphor that Caimi proposes and calls “a somewhat bold interpretation” (p. 118) is right on the mark, i.e., the fact that one could refer it not only to the origin of the categories, but to that of the relation between thought and being, thus to *the birth of experience* in its Kantian sense. As knowing subjects, we do not ‘know’ *a priori*, something about experience, but it arises originally at the moment in which forms, *a priori* functions manifest themselves together with the manifestation of things as phenomena. There is not, as Caimi writes, a “preformed empirical world” (p. 119), but neither is there a preformed *a priori* knowledge.

What the transcendental ‘I’ adds to the simple set of categorial rules constituted by the concepts of the understanding and the ‘judgements’ derived from them is the unification that this set of rules makes possible and that is

³⁰ Caimi recalls Lütterfelds’ thesis that “the ‘I think’ is a proposition of the same kind as the rules of grammar” (p. 29, note 8). This is equally true of the categories as principles of a transcendental logic; the constant analogy Kant uses in his lectures on logic between grammar rules and logical rules must be remembered (cf. AA 16: 023: “Jetzt werden sie gleichsam die grammatic des Verstandes und Vernunft lernen” [“Now you will learn, as it were, the grammar of the understanding and of the reason”]).

manifested by the inescapable possibility of the 'I think'. This unification can only take place in time, because experience itself takes place in time, and thus bring synchronic and diachronic unity into play.³¹ If, however, we go in the direction of emphasising the peculiar sense sketched above of the categories, I wonder whether that 'having before one's eyes' one's own function that we have referred to does not further weaken in its psychological sense. The possibility of the 'I think' – thus of a literally conscious act on the part of the subject – remains only the argumentatively important index of a possibility of unification explained by the concepts of the understanding, but not grounded in the consciousness (conscious knowledge) of them, thus radically *implicit*.

5. Empty or Too Full? The Existence of Empirical Objects

I have tried to highlight some basic problems that such an accurate and coherent reconstruction as that offered by Mario Caimi leaves open. These are clearly problems internal to Kant's thought and not to the exegesis offered, which also create difficulties for other readings, some of which I have referred to. Many other interesting aspects of Caimi's interpretation cannot be discussed here. Perhaps only on a more specific point, which concerns the way in which a section of the argumentative path of deduction is understood, would I briefly dwell, because it also has to do with the meaning it takes. It may have a connection with that methodological appeal to the reciprocity between transcendental principles and experience that I hypothesised above as central.

I refer to the reading of §22 of the transcendental deduction. According to Caimi, Kant deals here with the hypothesis that, once the necessity of categories for the knowledge of *possible* objects has been demonstrated, it would be conceivable that "there are no objects at all" (p. 64), i.e., that categories were empty forms of thought. Posing this hypothesis and answering it could only mean that there might not be any entities at all

³¹ The unification necessary for the constitution of experience is that of the multiplicity of different temporal inputs in a synchronic unity, and that, more complex, to which Kant refers in the synthesis of recognition in the concept, of a diachronic type: it is that which constitutes the actual "history of experience". It can be traced, if one wants a comparison with contemporary elaborations, to the higher-order consciousness indicated by Edelman (2004), which to the "remembered present" of primary consciousness adds an extension into the past and future and which for Edelman is made possible by the presence of a conceptual self.

that respond to the properties of 'objects' (of a being identifiable through necessary relational rules, etc.). So, the transcendental deduction would only prove, up to that point, that if there are objects in general, then the categories are the necessary conditions of their knowledge. However, following this reading, Kant's aim here would be to respond – taking it seriously – to a radical sceptical challenge, which would question the very existence of an objective world. This part of the transcendental deduction would propose a kind of demonstration of the existence of objects. This is what Kant undoubtedly does in the Confutation of Idealism and other texts; however, I am not sure he has this goal here. But even if the point at issue were, more narrowly, to overcome an objection on the path of deduction, according to which the demonstration that the categories are necessary for possible objects would leave open the proof that they are also necessary for actual ones, I think this further step would not be considered indispensable for Kant. Indeed, the domain of the possible includes the real, therefore if something is shown to be necessary for a possible entity it is necessary for the real; and the categories precisely draw the possible experience, which is the reason why they can be *a priori* (reality cannot be anticipated *a priori*). The risk of the categories being “mere forms of thought” (B 150, 148; Caimi, 2014, p. 64) – *empty* concepts – is perhaps sufficiently eluded by their constitutive reference (already demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs of the deduction) to intuition, not to ‘real objects’. This is why I think this formulation may perhaps be misleading: “Through the category an object is thought; but it is thought in general, not as this or that empirical, actually existing object” (p. 66).

It seems to me that the purpose of this §22 is exclusively negative, namely that of limiting the meaning and use of the categories to the objects of empirical intuition, as indeed its title indicates. It does not seem to me to add anything to their deduction, only to specify it. Categories are conditions of objectivity, but this objectivity is only empirical (it does not concern supersensible entities). So, the question is not “if there actually is something that corresponds to the concept” (p. 66), but rather: by virtue of what further condition can the categories be what they are, the condition of empirical objectivity. The questions are not as equivalent as they might seem: the first is precisely an anti-sceptical question, directed against a radical scepticism (there is no objectivity, the conditions of objectivity are like the conditions for the existence of ghosts, in fact empty); the second is merely the further

unfolding of an aspect that is already clear, if you will the insistence that categories are conditions of thought that require intuition,³² insofar as they are functions of unification of a multiple that they do not produce. So, the basic problem would not be the risk of a vacuum, but rather that the categories are taken as means to know the supersensible, thus filled with too much content.

In this sense, it does not seem to me that “the new element of empirical intuition” (p. 69) has been introduced into transcendental deduction between §21 and 22, which I think was already there. Kant simply insists on and specifies the impossibility of a further use of categories. Experience, the actual existence of objects, does not – if what was emphasised above about the structure of ‘reciprocity’ applies – need deduction in the context of transcendental deduction.

I have tried to highlight some of the problems that Mario Caimi's masterful commentary leaves open, most of which probably indicate not only unresolved issues in his thinking but also tasks for the future. Kant himself however invited us not to give up, in the face of the complexity of his philosophical project, mindful of its importance. As he wrote, we “must also clearly understand from the outset its inevitable difficulty, so that” we “will not complain of obscurity where the subject-matter itself is deeply veiled or become annoyed too soon over the removal of hindrances” (A 89/B 121). Some obstacles must be removed, others must first be clearly seen and recognised as such. Be that as it may, Kant's transcendental deduction will continue to offer enigmas to interpreters. However, thanks to Caimi, we have more light to try to move through its obscurity.

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³² The expression “whether there can be things which must be intuited in this form, is still undecided” (B 147), which Caimi quotes, and which seems to go in this direction, refers to mathematical concepts. Kant's reasoning in §22 seems to me to be of this type: for there to be knowledge and not mere thought, intuition is necessary; what is possible for us is sensible intuition, which can be pure or empirical; pure intuition does not allow true knowledge, except mediately, i.e., referring to “things in space and time” that are given through perception, empirical representation. Therefore, categories do not give rise to knowledge if only applied to space and time, but only if applied to spatio-temporal objects. This reasoning does not seem to me to lead to the existence of objects (refuting the idea “that there are no objects at all”, p. 64), but only to the limitation of meaning of the categories.

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