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TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS, HOW-POSSIBLE QUESTIONS, AND THE AIM OF EPISTEMOLOGY

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1. Cassam´s Approach to Epistemology

I want to start with resuming Cassam´s approach in its motivational structure. In *The Possibility of Knowledge*, Cassam develops his multi-level-approach (ML approach) by which he reacts to questions how a certain kind of knowledge is possible. How-possible questions arise in connection with considering obstacles which could interfere with the acquisition of knowledge. Faced with such obstacles, how is it possible for us to acquire a certain knowledge? An epistemological how-possible question requires at least two kinds of answers (Cassam 2007, 9-10):

Level I: Means are specified how the respective knowledge can be acquired.
Level II: The alleged obstacle is removed by showing how it can be overcome or dissipated.

There is a third level which has a somewhat precarious status:

Level III: Necessary enabling background conditions of knowledge are specified.

Cassam wants to show that the third level is not required to answer how-possible questions, but that it may under appropriate circumstances contribute to answering them. It may enrich our reflective perspective on our knowledge. Cassam´s motive is to evade the Scylla of a minimalist account as provided by Timothy Williamson (2000) which restricts epistemology to level I, and the Charybdis of a maximalist theory which is to systematically capture necessary a priori conditions of knowledge. Cassam explicitly draws on Kant´s question how knowledge is possible. According to Kant, the subject of his *Critique of Pure Reason* is the following:

> The real task of pure reason is contained in the question: How are synthetic **a priori judgements** possible? (*CpR*, B 19, my translation, Kant´s emphasis)

Cassam does not want to make a merely historical philological point but to provide a philosophical theory of knowledge which is Kantian in spirit. This becomes obvious when he describes his approach as answering the question "What is knowledge":

> (W_k) What is knowledge? …The Means Response to questions like (W_k) and (W_{ek}) is different from other popular responses. In particular, it is different from the analytic response to (W_k), according to which the way to explain what knowledge is is to analyse the concept of knowledge with a view to uncovering non-circular necessary and sufficient conditions. The Means Response doesn´t imply that the concept is unanalysable in this sense, but it does suggest that analysing the concept of knowledge into more basic concepts is not the only or the best way of explaining what knowledge is. (Cassam 2007, 83f.)

Cassam maintains that the best way to tackle the most basic question of epistemology, the issue of the nature of knowledge, is not a definition specifying necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge, for instance "knowledge is justified true belief". In doing so he opposes the tradition in analytic philosophy which focused on problems of definitions and especially with regard to the Gettier problem developed more and more refined versions of necessary and sufficient conditions. In rejecting the definitional task, Cassam joins the company of Williamson who considers knowledge as an unanalysable factive mental state (Williamson 2000, Cassam 2007, 44).

A particular strength of Cassam´s approach is its flexibility. We may say that he replaces an overambitioned project by a more pedestrian one. The task is not to provide necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge but certain sufficient conditions of a certain kind of knowledge which is threatened by concrete obstacles (cf. Cassam 2007, 13). Then these obstacles are removed. In the end, relevant necessary background conditions are provided at level III. Cassam rejects the demand of solving sceptical problems (Cassam 2007, 170). His referring to obstacles can be understood as a sober surrogate of antisceptical argument programs. This is illustrated by Cassam´s discussing the question of the possibility of perceptual knowledge: "The object of the exercise is simply to explain how perceptual knowledge is possible, *given* that it is possible."(Cassam 2007, 34) Sceptical doubts are replaced by apprehending obstacles

which can be removed by recurring to intuitive claims to knowledge which a sceptic is not disposed to grant.

In order for this project to be successful, Cassam must counter the tradition of analytic interpretations of Kant which aim at developing transcendental arguments from Kant´s work.

2. Cassam against Transcendental Arguments

Cassam argues that the ML approach is the appropriate way of answering Kant´s original question how synthetic a priori knowledge is possible. In contrast, transcendental arguments are neither necessary nor sufficient to to provide such an answer. Where Kant offers transcendental arguments, their function must be different from answering the question how synthetic a priori knowledge is possible if they are to have a significance at all (Cassam 2007, 56). Ultimately Cassam must endorse a stronger claim: If epistemology is to answer the question "What is knowledge?", transcendental arguments are not mandatory. The ML approach is sufficient to answer this question:

> once we have seen the possibility of a multi-levels response to (HP_{ek}) and (HP_{pk}), with its emphasis on means rather than on necessary conditions, we no longer need transcendental arguments. (Cassam 2007, 61)

This does not mean that transcendental arguments are futile or meaningless. But epistemology can in principle do without them.

Cassam provides a thorough distinction of his ML approach from transcendental arguments. The general form of such arguments as Cassam envisages them is given by the following quote:

> [...]there is experience, necessarily if there is experience then p, therefore p. On an anti-sceptical reading, p is a proposition which is the target of sceptical attack, and the argument proceeds by showing that the truth of p is a necessary condition for something which the sceptic does not and cannot doubt. (Cassam 2007, 54)

Although Cassam can be read as restricting transcendental arguments to the possibility of outer or inner experience, I assume a more general understanding of them:[21] Let a knowledge claim that p be contentious. The aim is to establish knowledge that p. An uncontentious q is taken as a starting point in order to show that p is a necessary condition of q.[22] In contrast to transcendental arguments which aim at necessary conditions, the ML approach mainly aims at measures of acquiring knowledge which are to count as sufficient given certain background conditions but are not supposed to be necessary. The ML approach and transcendental arguments seem to have in common that at level III necessary background conditions are brought to light. Transcendental arguments may serve this task. But as Cassam emphasizes, conditions exhibited at level III are necessary with regard to gaining knowledge by specific means (Cassam 2007, 55). However, later Cassam grants that answers at level III can but need not be means-specific (Cassam 2007, 65). One may add that background conditions must be relevant. It is open in how far transcendental arguments are available which allow to uncover such necessary background conditions and in how far they provide criteria of relevance. Basically transcendental arguments cannot give due weight to conditions which are sufficient but not necessary for acquiring a certain knowledge, as certain measures of acquiring knowledge. In so far they prove to be ill-suited to systematically contribute to level I. In turn they can be avoided if the task is to explain how knowledge is attained provided sufficient but not necessary conditions are available (Cassam 2007, 61). They seem only occasionally suited to remove obstacles, especially by showing that maintaining them commits to not-p which can be excluded by a transcendental argument establishing that p. But since we rather expect a detailed explanation why an alleged obstacle does not threaten claims to knowledge than a proof that the obstacle cannot prevail, transcendental arguments seem of limited value at level II, too. Assume we had identified an obstacle to attain synthetic a priori knowledge, e.g. the problem how mere armchair reflection can provide access to independent facts. If a transcendental argument is apt to establish a certain piece of a priori knowledge, for instance by showing that a priori concepts can be applied to objects of experience if

[21] Note that restricting transcendental arguments to conditions of experience would amount to ignoring the wide variety of such arguments in analytic philosophy (for an overview cf. Genova 2008, 15).
[22] Here a discussion would be necessary how the presuppositional structure relates to the argumentative structure of transcendental arguments (cf. Gram 1971, 15-26, Rorty 1971, 3-14).

there is to be experiential knowledge, it shows that the obstacle cannot interfere with any case of a priori knowledge. But still the above problem remains.

In Cassam´s lights, the advantage of his strategy is that it allows to cope with the "generality problem"(Cassam 2007, 62-67). This problem results from the task of providing general necessary conditions of a certain kind of knowledge as in the case of transcendental arguments. Since knowledge can be attained in many ways, it is difficult to provide general necessary conditions. The requirement of necessary conditions on the one hand is too ambitious, namely in demanding necessary conditions, on the other hand it is too modest as it does not demand sufficient conditions. Approaches devoted exclusively to necessary conditions tend to falsely present necessary conditions of a certain pathway to knowledge as necessary conditions tout court of attaining the respective knowledge. In contrast, Cassam can limit himself to provide certain sufficient conditions without being obliged to completely listing pathways to a certain piece of knowledge.

Cassam distinguishes a) antisceptical transcendental arguments which replace q by some proposition the sceptic grants, and b) regressive transcendental arguments which start from the possibility of a certain knowledge, namely experiential knowledge which the sceptic is not ready to concede. What concerns antisceptical arguments, Cassam claims not to be in the business of refuting the sceptic but of asking how knowledge is possible given that it is possible. Since he wants to explain what knowledge is, antisceptical arguments do not seem to form part of the latter explanation. One feels inclined to conclude that epistemology can dispense with antisceptical arguments including transcendental arguments (a).

In order to further scrutinize whether a) antisceptical transcendental arguments are necessary or sufficient to answer how-possible questions, Cassam considers Kant´s refutation of idealism as a candidate for an antisceptical argument that perceptual knowledge of external objects is possible. The refutation of idealism does not show how such knowledge is possible: "we are none the wiser as to the best way of overcoming or dissipating apparent obstacles to its existence." (Cassam 2007, 55).[23] The same holds

[23] Furthermore, Cassam criticizes that the result of the proof is not established as a synthetic a priori truth (Cassam 2007, 56). Yet an argument of Genova´s may be used to amend the proof: „[...] since it [the proof´s result] is *antecedent* to the domain, it is a priori; since it is *applicable* to the domain, it is synthetic."(Genova, op. cit., 25) A domain for Genova is the common basis of the sceptic and her opponent.

for all antisceptical arguments in favour of synthetic a priori knowledge (Cassam 2007, 56). Cassam´s result is that antisceptical transcendental arguments do not contribute to answering how-possible questions. Their function lies in their antisceptical role. Rather they might contribute to uncovering relevant background conditions at level III. But it is doubtful that they are suited to do so as level-III arguments are not aimed at refuting scepticism. It would be a mere coincidence if antisceptical arguments selected *relevant* background conditions.

Cassam doubts that b) regressive arguments have a function at all. In order to discuss their alleged function, he recurs to Kant´s transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of understanding which he considers to be a regressive argument. One eventual function of regressive arguments is *revelatory*. They show something about our way of thinking, for example the use of a priori concepts. Yet Cassam is right to argue that we should know the fact that we use a priori concepts independently of a transcendental argument. (Cassam 2007, 68). Kant´s own aim seems to be to show the *validity* of the categories. Cassam´s decisive argument against this proposal is that the deduction would have the following structure: Starting from the way in which we must think, objective validity of the categories is inferred. Cassam finds this inference faulty: "Kant doesn´t explain why proving the indispensability of the categories in his sense amounts to a proof of their objective validity."(Cassam 2007, 78)[24] The third alternative considered by Cassam is an *explanatory* one. By uncovering a priori conditions, transcendental arguments explain our way of thinking. Cassam doubts that there is an explanatory function which is not better performed by the ML approach. If the latter really fulfils Cassam´s expectations, the above doubts seem justified.

[24] Cf. Stroud´s general criticism that transcendental arguments fail to show that subjective necessities of thinking amount to knowledge (Stroud, Barry: "Transcendental Arguments". In: *The Journal of Philosophy* 65. 1968, 291-356).

3. Problems of the Approach

How-Possible Questions and the Nature of Knowledge

In what follows I want to discuss respects in which Cassam´s project does not live up to what we would expect from an epistemology which is devoted to answering the question "What is knowledge?"

The claim that any how-possible question require level I and level II imposes strong constraints on the relationship of both levels. Both must be indispensable complements. What does this relationship precisely consist in? I want to present two interpretations of the program. The first is more faithful to Cassam´s programmatic statements. It relates to obstacles. We identify an obstacle which gives rise to the question how a certain kind of knowledge is possible. Then we identify means to achieve this knowledge. Finally we get rid of the obstacle with regard to using these means.

How-possible questions arise from obstacles becoming salient. Not any eventuality that a certain necessary condition of knowledge is not fulfilled is appropriate to raise a how-possible question. Under what circumstances does an obstacle become salient? One possibility of naming salient obstacles is recurring to the sceptical threat. But Cassam insists that he is not in the business of refuting the sceptic. Another possibility is that obstacles result from epistemological debate. For instance, Cassam develops obstacles of a priori knowledge from combining realism and empiricism (Hume´s problem). How can we have a priori knowledge of an independent real world without perceptual contact (Cassam 2007, 192f.)?[25] However, Cassam in the same context requires an intuitive backing. Obstacles must be grounded by intuitions. A third way of obstacles becoming salient is that natural intuitions give rise to them, perhaps mediated by epistemological debate. Notwithstanding these possibilities, it remains unclear how we can be reliable in identifying relevant obstacles. The suspicion arises that they are simply ad hoc. If epistemological reflection depends on identifying obstacles, it seems to follow that knowledge which is not threatened by salient obstacles does not require epistemological reflection. This may be in tune with Kant restricting his critique to a certain kind of synthetic a priori knowledge, but not with descriptive

[25] This question could also be formulated by recurring to the discussion in the philosophy of mathematics how we may grasp abstract objects without being in causal contact with them (cf. Benaceraff 1973).

efforts in contemporary epistemology to understand knowledge without pursuing the task of removing obstacles.

Furthermore the question is why level-I-questions must be answered at all. For in order to get rid of an obstacle, what happens at level II seems necessary and sufficient. Of course, in order to remove the obstacle, one may recur to means specified at level I. But there is another respect in which level II is independent of level I. The argument at level I explicitly is to merely provide a means of acquiring a certain knowledge. If there are several alternative means to acquire this knowledge, it is sufficient to specify one of them. An answer at level II may draw on means of acquiring knowledge which have not been specified at level I. Presumably Cassam has in mind a stronger relationship between level I and level II which involves that a salient obstacle threatens claims to knowledge. With regard to this obstacle means are specified to acquire the knowledge at stake. Then it is shown why the obstacle does not interfere with using these means. But how can Cassam exclude that obstacles are removed by an argument which exclusively focuses on the obstacles without taking further notice of means of acquiring the knowledge at stake? Perhaps I may be in a position to show that a certain objection to knowledge claims is self-defeating without having to take into account means by which the knowledge in question is acquired. How-possible questions which are focused on obstacles may be answered at level II without level I being necessary. If epistemology is oriented towards removing obstacles, exploring means does not seem to be interesting in its own right. Thus if we can do without exploring means, we do not need level I.

Besides the obstacle-related interpretation just presented there is a means-related one. The how-possible question is posed independently in order to show at level I a possibility of acquiring a certain knowledge. At level II, eventual obstacles are removed. This interpretation can be drawn from Cassam´s presentation of the problem of other minds which he offers as a paradigm application of his method:

> At one level we have the idea that seeing that someone else is angry is a means of knowing that he is angry and therefore also a means of knowing that there are other minds. At the next level we have the attempt to remove the obstacles to literally seeing that someone else is angry. (Cassam 2007, 161)

Firstly, a means is specified to know that someone else is angry. We directly perceive her anger. Then obstacles are removed which threaten the successful use of this measure. This lesson can also be drawn from Cassam´s Eurostar-example. The question how it is possible to get in three hours from Paris to London is answered by naming a means: Take the Eurostar (Cassam 2007, 47f.). No obstacle is mentioned.

If level I and level II are related in this way, knowing a means of acquiring knowledge may be a prerequisite to overcoming an obstacle. For the obstacle arises with regard to the means.[26] This reading of the above quote suggests that how-possible questions are not driven by salient obstacles but rather by the quest for means of acquiring a certain knowledge. When these means are specified, obstacles arise. Yet if how-possible questions are not devoted to removing salient obstacles but to exhibit means to acquire a certain knowledge, the function of level II becomes dubious. Should we have an interest in obstacles as such or merely with regard to completing the exploration of means? In the latter case, why is this exploration incomplete unless obstacles are tackled? Now removing eventual salient obstacles which happen to arise from specifying a certain pathway to knowledge surely is an important task of epistemological reflection. Thus level I and level II might have autonomous functions. But if these functions are completely autonomous, the question is how they interact so that Cassam is right to claim that both levels are necessary in order to answer how-possible questions. What if no obstacle is identified? In the Eurostar-example there are no obstacles. Is it sufficient to answer the how-possible question at level I? This objection could be countered by maintaining that level-II arguments sort of check the eventuality of obstacles. But why should such a check be necessary?

The principled problem of an interpretation which does not start from an obstacle that has been identified before is to motivate a how-possible question and the reaction of specifying a means. In the case of the threat posed by identifying an obstacle, the motivation is clear. The challenge is to be answered, one is to react to the threat. But what is the purpose of naming a means when a certain knowledge is already given? We are interested in means to acquire knowledge when we do not already know how this knowledge can be acquired. For example, it is an interesting task for Kant to figure out how philosophical a priori knowledge can be acquired. When we already

[26] However, as we have seen it is not always indispensable to know the means in order to remove the obstacle.

have knowledge, naming means seems idle and trivial. For we usually know the means. However, I already indicated that epistemological reflection might prove worthwhile or mandatory albeit no obstacles are identified. Yet it is questionable whether Cassam would share this strong requirement.

None of the two interpretations provides a sufficient motivation of the ML approach with its two necessary levels. Now we must take into account that the approach is not so much motivated by a certain problem but by a basic philosophical issue. What is at stake is to explain what knowledge is. This claim, however, faces its own difficulties. In the first interpretation outlined above, how-possible questions are obstacle-oriented. Why should the general question what knowledge is depend on an obstacle becoming salient? Why should it be answered by what is necessary to deal with the obstacle? The same questions arise with regard to the means-oriented interpretation. Why should specifying a means of acquiring a certain knowledge tell something about what knowledge is? While the definitional task aims at knowledge as such, at explaining the significance and meaning of knowledge, Cassam´s project does not live up to this sort of explanation as it does not tell anything about the aim and structure of knowledge but only something about how knowledge can be acquired.[27] It remains open in how far Cassam´s program which does not envisage completeness of means specified at level I or -as the Cartesian method of doubt- of obstacles discussed at level II, not even of salient obstacles, can achieve more than naming certain ways and removing certain inhibiting factors for some cases of knowledge. These shortcomings are aggravated by Cassam´s being rather unspecific about what means and obstacles are. Does a mathematician by developing a new proof articulate a means of acquiring knowledge and remove an obstacle which consists in there being no way of establishing the conclusion of the proof? Surely not. But why not? How does Cassam´s notion of means and obstacles rule out this case? Furthermore, Cassam does not indicate how concrete our specification of means must be. Is it sufficient for naming a means of knowing the external world to say "by sense perception"?

It might be interesting to name means of acquiring knowledge. It might be of the utmost importance to remove obstacles which could interfere with the acquisition of

[27] This criticism is reminiscient of Dummett´s criticism of truth-conditional semantics which does not specify the aim of using language, attaining truth. (Dummett 1978, 2). As the debate about the value of knowledge shows, the definitional approach, too, may leave some issues regarding our epistemic aims unsolved (cf. the discussion in Zagzebski and Fairweather 2001).

knowledge, but in how far does it enlighten the nature of knowledge? Cassam achieves the transition to the question W_k (What is knowledge?) by dint of the question

(W_{ek}) What is empirical knowledge? (Cassam 2007, 81)

The epitheton "empirical" in fact offers a good starting point for Cassam´s two-level-approach as it creates a certain conversational context. It already involves an answer to the means-question (by experience) which can be further enlightened by further specification (by sense perception, seeing, hearing). However, the transition from the specific question what empirical knowledge is to the general question what knowledge is is problematic. The defendant of the definitional tradition could argue that the latter issue does not reduce to emphasizing certain means and to removing certain obstacles but requires explaining what factive mental states arising in many different ways have in common such that they deserve to be called knowledge. It is not at all clear what the status of the question what knowledge is could be in a scientific endeavour of answering how-possible questions. Thus it would be more consequent for Cassam to pursue his therapeutic approach and to discredit what-is questions as obsolete metaphysics: "Do not ask what-is questions but concrete how-possible questions."
These worries are confirmed by Cassam´s comment on how-possible questions by which he argues against the attempt of removing level-III arguments from epistemology:

> What counts as a philosophically satisfying answer to (HP_{pk}) is always a matter of one´s philosophical interests, and while one might think that explaining how perceptual knowledge is possible is fundamentally a matter of knowing what makes it possible, one might also think that explaining how perceptual knowledge is possible is fundamentally a matter of overcoming apparent obstacles to its existence. (Cassam 2007, 128)

Cassam relativizes the answer to how-possible questions. When we ask how knowledge by perception is possible –a paradigm case of a how-possible question- sometimes the issue is what makes such knowledge possible, i.e. a level-I argument, sometimes the issue is to remove obstacles, depending on one´s interests. But how can Cassam at the same time claim that any how-possible question somehow requires level-I and level-II arguments and that these arguments exhaust what is required of an epistemology? It

seems rather as if level-I- and level-II arguments are relevant depending on philosophical interests of answering certain such questions. Regarding these concessions and the difficulty of showing that level-I- and level-II arguments both are necessary and sufficient to answer how-possible questions, Cassam probably would do better not to distinguish between necessary and optional elements of epistemology but between more and less relevant issues in light of epistemological interests. As already said, the status of level III is problematic. Level III does not seem necessary. Nevertheless Cassam spends a lot of acumen to show that there are valid a priori arguments which are to be placed on level III:

> The important point, therefore, is not that we must say something about a priori enabling conditions... but that there are a priori enabling conditions and that philosophical reflection can tell us what they are if we are interested. (Cassam 2007, 128)

While Cassam originally maintained a sharp contrast between necessary level-I and -II and optional level-III arguments, all these arguments now seem to be relative to interests one may have or not.

One final worry: If Cassam´s program is to replace the definition project, it must claim general validity. Level I and level II both must be applicable to knowledge as such. But how do they relate to knowledge we claim to have without being in a position to specify means of attaining it at all? Thomas Reid considers the eventuality of an immediate knowledge which is not conveyed by "instruments" or "means"(Reid 1983, 186a-187b).[28] In fact we seem to have many convictions without our being able to name means how they were or could be acquired or tested, for instance because they are so basic. Probably I know that there won´t open an abyss in front of my chamber door when no one is looking, but it might prove difficult to tell how I know it. These examples indicate that there are cases of immediate knowledge which cannot be subject to a two-level approach as endorsed by Cassam. A sceptic could point to obstacles of such immediate knowledge. But how can we hope to discard these obstacles by recurring to means of acquiring immediate knowledge?

[28] Hegel´s criticism of any epistemology drawing on "means", "instruments", "media" of knowledge most probably relates to these passages of Reid´s (Hegel 1980, 53).

4. Transcendental Arguments Strike Back

I now want to argue that Cassam systematically undervalues the role of transcendental arguments regarding Kant´s and Cassam´s own approach and the resources of a general theory of knowledge. Transcendental arguments may contribute to answering how-possible questions. Cassam does not conclusively establish that they can be avoided in epistemology.

Often the question "How possible" also involves a claim of showing that something is possible. Consider the following dialogue: The president of the Royal Society: "How is it possible to travel around the world in eighty days? Travelling to India alone needs three months." Passepartout: "Phileas Fogg did it." The question "how is it possible to have synthetic a priori knowledge?" can be meant as a sceptical threat to a priori knowledge claims. One may react to such a threat by showing that it must be possible if something else which is not put into doubt is.

Now Cassam may rightly insist on Kant´s distinction between the question how and the question whether a certain knowledge is possible in the case of pure mathematics and science. (*CpR* B 20-21). But this seems to be due to the whether-question having already been answered. The case of metaphysics is different. The question whether is part of the question how. This becomes obvious in the transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding which is announced as answer to a how-possible question but which I will show at least partly to be treated as a question whether.

Cassam emphasizes that transcendental arguments do not provide an explanation how to overcome a certain obstacle. But if it is asked why we have to overcome such an obstacle, why we are interested in how-possible questions at all, the consideration plays a central role that such obstacles threaten our knowledge claims. If overcoming obstacles is meant to defend knowledge claims against the threat these obstacles pose, antisceptical arguments offer answers. When one has identified an obstacle to know whether p and an argument shows that without p there is no q which one knows for sure, this might be sufficient. One does not always have to further explain away the obstacle because one may be satisfied by one´s knowledge claims being saved. Thus transcendental arguments may contribute to answering level-II questions. This does not mean that they answer a how-possible question in all relevant facets. Besides knowing

that there are no obstacles it might be interesting to concretely explain why certain obstacles do not prevail.[29] But if something might prove supererogatory about epistemological reflection, then this additional interest. Here again a difficulty of Cassam´s original program becomes obvious. If on the one hand, epistemological scrutiny is exclusively challenge- or obstacle-oriented, the question is why to bother about level I and explaining away obstacles in cases in which it can be simply shown that they cannot prevail. If on the other hand, such scrutiny is to answer the question W_k (What is knowledge?), showing that an obstacle does not prevail does not seem to exhaust the general epistemological issue. But then we may ask why this issue has to be triggered by an obstacle. Furthermore it is not excluded that a transcendental argument according to which a certain obstacle for this and this reason does not obtain may be an important part of a level-II argument.

Cassam contents himself with distinguishing necessary conditions of knowledge which are at issue in transcendental arguments from means as presented by the ML approach. But this distinction is insufficient. Consider what is at issue in transcendental arguments: to establish p, granted q, by showing that p is a prerequisite to q. Cassam presents transcendental arguments as if they were to show necessary conditions of q, e.g. experiential knowledge. But the aim of a transcendental argument is not to show that p is a necessary condition of knowing that q, but by showing this to establish knowledge that p.[30] Taking into account that how-possible questions could be understood as requiring to demonstrate the possibility of a certain knowledge, Cassam´s opposition of necessary and sufficient conditions can be put into question. When we ask what means as to be exhibited at level I are, one may characterize them as sufficient but

[29] In conversation Cassam argued that transcendental arguments do not tell anything interesting about removing obstacles. Assume p to imply not-r. A sceptic might claim that since knowledge is inferentially closed, r has to be ruled out. Assume further that I am certain that p. Thus there is a trivial way of removing the obstacle by insisting on p. But this surely is not sufficient to explain why the obstacle does not prevail. Yet firstly it may be asked what Cassam further requires. The problem can be illustrated by the following argument (Cassam 2007, 33): In order to refute the demand that experiential knowledge presupposes an independent proof that we do not dream, Cassam argues that this demand is less plausible than our claim to knowledge. But this amounts to taking the knowledge which is at stake in the how-possible question as (more) certain in order to conclude that the obstacle cannot prevail. There is no further explanation why it does not prevail , and we do not need one either. Secondly, transcendental arguments do not have the form Cassam suggests them to have. Transcendental arguments do not simply recur to p to rule out implication r which allegedly threatens p. Rather an independent q is used to establish p.

[30] Cassam grants that transcendental arguments may provide synthetic a priori knowledge but insists that they do not answer how it is possible (Cassam 2007, 56). As I will argue below, they answer this question by exhibiting themselves as a means of acquiring synthetic a priori knowledge.

not always necessary conditions of a certain knowledge. As such they are opposed to necessary conditions which are the alleged target of transcendental arguments. But if the aim of transcendental arguments is taken into account, this opposition is too simple. For transcendental arguments are not to establish necessary conditions of knowing that q but to establish knowledge that p as a necessary condition of knowing q. Knowledge that q provides a sufficient condition of knowing that p which is the aim of inquiry. Of course we do not interpret any sufficient condition of knowing that p as a means of attaining knowledge that p. But considering the vagueness of Cassam´s notion of means, it seems arbitrary to deny that a transcendental argument can have a function at level I. It constitutes and by its very realization manifests a means to attain knowledge that p. At least the opposition of necessary and sufficient conditions as subjects of transcendental arguments respectively of the ML approach cannot be upheld in this way.

This last argument shows that transcendental arguments may establish knowledge which is the subject of a how-possible question, not only uncover necessary conditions of a piece of knowledge. Taking into account the interest-relativity of epistemological questions which is emphasized by Cassam, it seems ideological to discredit transcendental arguments as superfluous or unnecessary. It is a strength and not a weakness of antisceptical transcendental arguments that they promise answers to the sceptic. It is a strength, no weakness if they provide a way, perhaps the only way of establishing a certain piece of knowledge directly.

A decisive argument of Cassam´s is the generality problem. Now one could imagine to formulate disjunctively necessary conditions. Conditions of spatial vision could be turned into necessary conditions of sense perception tout court by forming part of a disjunction:

1) If sense perception is realized by visual experience, the objects perceived must occupy different positions in space (condition I).
2) If sense perception is realized by auditory experience, … (condition II).
3) Thus it is a necessary condition of sense perception that objects occupy different positions in space (condition I), or… (condition II).

An alternative would be to specify premiss q of a transcendental argument, for instance by replacing the question how sense perception is possible by the question how knowledge can be obtained by dint of visual sense perception. It remains to be examined how far such arguments can lead. Cassam does not present principled objections.[31]

Cassam asks what the deeper function of regressive transcendental arguments (b) is. This question can be answered by recurring to his own considerations regarding the dependence of achievements like epistemic seeing on spatial perception and categorial concepts which are presented as paradigms of a priori knowledge:[32]
Firstly, the argument for the necessity of spatial perception:

1) We perceive material objects.
2) Perception of material objects requires the ability to perceive them as material objects.
3) Perception of material objects as such requires the ability to perceive their primary qualities.
4) Primary qualities of material objects are spatial properties.
5) Thus perception of material objects requires the ability to perceive spatial properties.
6) Thus we are in a position to perceive spatial properties (Cassam 2007, 121f.).

[31] Cassam denies that transcendental arguments can be limited to certain ways of perceiving (Cassam 2007, 65). However, he does not say why.

[32] A problem of the notion of epistemic seeing can be derived from Cassam´s handling the other minds problem. In Cassam´s opinion we may see someone´s anger in his face. Cassam uses Dretske´s analysis::

"... conditions are such that he wouldn´t look the way he looks now unless he was angry, and … believing that the conditions are like this I take him to be angry."(Cassam 2007, 163)

The difficulty is twofold. Firstly, when one considers how strongly laden with theory such a direct perception may be, it seems as if we might be able to directly perceive anything provided we entertain a suitable background theory which tells us correctly that something would not be perceived in this way if it were not… (cf. Brandom 1994, 223). Cassam aims his argument at refuting a sceptic who argues that sense perception leaves claims to knowledge underdetermined. If allegedly direct perception is revealed to be laden with theory, the sceptic might take this to confirm her distinction of what is delivered by the senses and of what is made in our theory of it. Then she may ask how the former may ground the latter. Secondly, the problem is that direct perception is too cheap. I may claim that I perceive electrons when I see water because since water is necessarily built up from electrons, it would not look that way if it were not composed of electrons. Of course, other things might look the same way. But then they are not water. And it was presupposed that we are looking at water.

In Cassam´s opinion the conclusion of this argument can be, given the first premiss, attained a priori. Cassam emphasizes that we do not always perceive material objects spatially, for instance when we hear them. Any non-spatial perception of material objects presupposes that we have the ability of directly perceiving such objects spatially. The argument depends on the assumption that we perceive material objects and elucidates necessary conditions of this perception. Since this presupposition is not resilient to scepticism, it may be understood as premiss of a regressive transcendental argument which ascends from given experiential knowledge to its a priori conditions.

An analogous role plays Cassam´s argument that perception presupposes applying the categories. This argument can be regarded as replacing the transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding whose original function is questioned by Cassam.

1) We have perceptual knowledge of objects.
2) Perceptual knowledge of objects requires the possibility of applying empirical concepts to them.
3) The application of empirical concepts presupposes that such concepts can be related to more basic concepts which specify e.g. the causal behaviour of objects.
4) In order to achieve this, these basic concepts must be applied to the objects of perceptual knowledge.
5) These basic concepts are the categories.
6) Thus the categories are applicable to the objects of perceptual knowledge (cf. Cassam 2007, 148-150).

This argument, too, can, given the first premiss, be known a priori.
The explicit role of the above arguments in Cassam´s theory is metaepistemological. Cassam wants to show that level-III arguments may play a role in answering epistemological how-possible questions notwithstanding their being dispensable. What is the function of regressive transcendental arguments? If the above arguments are regressive transcendental arguments, Cassam must envisage a function for regressive transcendental arguments as he attributes it to level III. This function is to uncover

interesting background conditions of knowledge. Thus one function of regressive transcendental arguments is to uncover interesting background conditions of knowledge. As already shown, they may play a role at level I and level II, too.

However, it seems doubtful that the above arguments merely have a metaepistemological function. Cassam does not choose these arguments at random. They capture central subjects of Kant´s thought, namely his a priori accounting for the role of space and of the categories as necessary conditions of perceptually knowing objects. They are what remains from these subjects when they are soberly analysed. Furthermore Cassam uses them in order to further develop his theory of directly perceiving that… The upshot is that Cassam himself construes essential parts of Kant´s epistemology in a way which characterizes them as regressive transcendental arguments. Furthermore, these arguments are of great interest to Cassam´s own approach. The greater the interest, the more doubtful the claim that they are optional and less important than in other epistemologies.

5. Remnants of Kant

In this section I want to criticize Cassam´s reception of Kant from a more philological perspective.

There is a principled tension between Cassam´s claim of following Kant´s intentions and the way in which he presents Kant´s arguments. Decisive arguments as the refutation of idealism, the a priori proof that spatial perception is necessary for experiential knowledge, and the transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding are presented as transcendental arguments and not as necessary conditions of answering the original question how synthetic a priori knowledge is possible. Cassam´s understanding of these arguments allows to subsume them under level-III arguments. But the question is where the level-I and level-II –arguments are to be found which according to Cassam are necessary in order for Kant to adequately pursue his own basic question how synthetic a priori knowledge is possible. Thus Cassam´s criticism of transcendental arguments seems to amount to a principled criticism of Kant´s epistemology.

For this reason it seems appropriate to consider an alternative understanding of Kant´s question how synthetic a priori knowledge is possible, which is the general theme of his whole critique of pure reason. Kant wants to elucidate which synthetic a priori knowledge we may acquire. He does not only want to discuss obstacles and means of acquiring such knowledge but already to acquire at least the most basic parts of this knowledge as far as it is the task of critical philosophy in contrast to pure mathematics and natural science. Concerning genuinely philosophical a priori knowledge, one must answer the question whether there is such knowledge. Kant does not content himself with indicating certain sources of a priori knowledge like reflection and obstacles like Hume´s problem, but he directly guides us to acquiring this knowledge. In Cassam´s taxonomy: Kant aims at an extremely comprehensive level-I and level-II answer by presenting: showing and using a means and removing obstacles of acquiring synthetic a priori knowledge as far as it is a philosophical issue. In order to achieve this basic a priori knowledge, transcendental arguments are indispensable (why has been shown in the last section). Kant can start from experiential knowledge which has not been put into question by asking how synthetic a priori knowledge is possible. By providing sufficient conditions of synthetic a priori knowledge, he answers the question how such knowledge is possible. In discussing Ameriks´ understanding of regressive arguments, Cassam suggests that such arguments are to answer how experiential knowledge is possible but objects that Kant does not ask this how-possible question (Cassam 2007, 57, cf. Ameriks 2003, 51). I applaud. Kant´s aim is not to name necessary conditions of experience, but in naming them to explore a pathway to synthetic a priori knowledge

In so far it has been shown which role transcendental arguments can play for Kant. Yet there seems to be a possibility of interpreting their role much stronger. Cassam argues that how-possible questions do not aim at necessary conditions. But one has to take into account that Kant aims at transcendental conditions of experience. It seems preposterous to claim that all transcendental conditions of experience must be fulfilled in order for a certain knowledge to be possible. But transcendental conditions have certain peculiarities. Firstly in Kant´s opinion they cannot be replaced by other a priori or a posteriori conditions. They are necessary and thus eligible for transcendental arguments. Secondly, Kant endorses a strong notion of systematicity. The parts of the

system of transcendental philosophy are so strongly interdependent that no part can persist without the others (cf. *CpR* B 27-28). In so far all answers which we can a priori provide to how-possible questions depend on all other such answers. This does not mean that all a priori conditions of experience do, but we may conjecture that there is a connection within the faculty of reason which may be interpreted as a necessary connection among conditions of experience. In a system of philosophy, all non-trivial transcendental conditions of experience must be specified. Thus Kant probably would reject the idea to name sufficient but not necessary conditions of knowledge. In a sense to be cashed out by considerations about the architecture of knowledge, all transcendental conditions of experience are necessary and indispensable. A specification of these conditions must take the form of an extremely complex transcendental argument which consists in uncovering transcendental conditions of experience.

I want to finish with discussing Cassam´s criticism of the transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding. Cassam maintains that the aim of the deduction is to show that without the categories we would not be in a position of thinking about objects (*CpR* A 92-93). Indeed this is what Kant considers to be the core of the deduction which must be valid in order for the deduction to be, too (*CpR* A XVII). Cassam doubts that the mere indispensability of the categories for thinking objects is sufficient to prove that by the categories we really come to know objects. But firstly this does not count against Kant endorsing an –unsuccessful- program of epistemologically validating the categories. Secondly I do not fully understand what Cassam is missing.[33] He might presuppose too strong a reading of the core of the deduction according to which the aim is to show that by using the categories, we attain knowledge of objects. But the aim of the proof must be given a weaker reading:

1) We have experiential knowledge.
2) If there is anything we know, then it is an object.
3) The concepts which are necessary conditions of thinking an object must apply to the objects of knowledge in order for us to have knowledge of them.
4) The categories are necessary conditions of thinking an object.

[33] Genova insists that Kant himself anticipates the Cassam-Stroud problem and wants to solve it by the deduction: "Even if the categories are constitutive of our thought about objects, why should objects themselves conform to the subjective necessity of the categories?"(Genova 2008, 18) Genova refers to *CpR* A 85 / B 117, A 91 / B 123, A 94 / B 127, B 160, B 167-168.

5) The categories apply to the objects of knowledge.
6) We have experiential knowledge only by virtue of the categories.

Of course this does not show but presuppose that we really know objects. If the aim is to show that the categories are objectively valid, the aim of the proof as achieved by this variant of the deduction cannot consist in proving that we have knowledge of objects by dint of the categories but it must rather consist in proving that, given we have knowledge, we have this knowledge by dint of the categories. The categories are valid for anything which is an object of knowledge. The deduction can be read as a classical regressive argument in this interpretation, too, as Cassam himself does. We want to know whether the categories are objectively valid. We presuppose that we have experiential knowledge and show that the categories are necessary to have such knowledge. I doubt that Kant wants to conform to a stronger notion of validity than the one that we cannot but conceptualize eventual claims to knowledge by virtue of the categories.

Furthermore, Kant seems to envisage in this classical regressive argument an answer to a specific how-possible question,

> how subjective conditions of thinking should have objective validity, i.e. provide conditions of the possibility of any knowledge of objects… (*CpR* B 122)[34]

This counts against Cassam´s reading of how-possible questions in Kant´s philosophy. Kant´s comprehensive how-possible question is how synthetic a priori knowledge is possible and not how experiential knowledge is possible. Thus one could interpret the transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding as a contribution to level I. The deduction is not merely to show conditions of experience. By uncovering necessary conditions of experience, Kant shows and goes the pathway towards synthetic

[34] I take it for granted that Kant here indirectly poses the question how knowledge of the categories as conditions of experience is possible. With Genova´s contention in mind (cf. last note) one may tend to read Kant as stating Cassam´s problem how subjective conditions of thinking can have objective validity. But how can that question be answered by the above argument? Firstly, the argument could be taken to simply say this: How can subjective conditions of thinking be conditions of objects of knowledge? Well, since knowledge requires thinking and thinking requires applying the categories to objects, the categories are not merely conditions of thinking but must apply to objects. An alternative would be to deny that the above deduction is sufficient and to recur to the further considerations outlined below according to which objects are nothing more than an x which is filled by a synthesis according to concepts.

a priori knowledge regarding the categories and their applicability as necessary conditions of knowing objects.

I want to conclude by opposing two interpretations of the deduction: an interpretation as a regressive argument and a stronger one which rests on the following famous quote from the first deduction:

> Thus the original and necessary awareness of one´s own identity is an awareness of a necessary unity of the synthesis of all appearances according to concepts, i.e. according to rules which do not only make appearances reproducible but in this way determine an object of intuition, i.e. the concept of something in which they necessarily cohere: for the mind could impossibly a priori think its own identity in the manifold of its ideas if it did not have before its eyes the identity of the act which subjects all synthesis of apprehension (which is empirical) to a transcendental unity and makes their connection according to a priori rules possible. (*CpR* A 108)

From this the following argument can be derived:

1) I a priori know that I can accompany any of my representations by an "I think".
2) In order to know this, one must be a priori aware of an act of synthesis by which one connects all representations to objects.
3) This awareness depends on one´s being a priori aware of connecting all one´s representations so as to yield objects according to concepts of objects.
4) This awareness depends on one´s a priori connecting all one´s representations so as to yield objects according to concepts of objects.
5) Concepts of objects a priori are the categories.
6) The objective validity of the categories consists in connecting all one´s representations according to them.
7) Thus the categories are valid for all objects which are synthesized from one´s own representations.

Although I consider such an understanding of the deduction to be philologically cogent, I do not want to address the question how it relates to Kant´s explanation of his deduction strategy. In any case, this reading is suited to form an antisceptical argument as it rests on the Cartesian certainty of being in a position to accompany all one´s thoughts by an "I think" (cf. Henrich 1976). The further mentioned premisses are not

trivial but they can at least be suggested to a sceptic. If this consideration correctly conveys Kant´s intentions, it is tempting to read the transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding to which Kant accords a central importance for understanding discoursive capacities as an antisceptical transcendental argument.[35] Such a reading does not necessarily require Kant to target a sceptic. It is sufficient that he does not presuppose knowledge of objects as he would if he offered a regressive transcendental argument drawing on the possibility of knowing objects of experience. By the way, if this argument can really be read as an antisceptical transcendental argument, it shows that even with regard to Kant, the available premisses of such arguments should not be confined to experience or inner experience.

To summarize: Cassam is right to point to a certain tension between how-possible questions and transcendental arguments as they are usually interpreted. However, it seems questionable that his multi-level approach is suited to attain his ambitious epistemological aims. Cassam systematically underrates the principal resources of transcendental arguments. Furthermore the outlook of basing the multi-level approach and the criticism of transcendental arguments on Kant´s historical position does not seem promising.

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[35] "I do not know any enquiries which would be more important to scrutinizing the faculty which we call understanding and to determining the rules and limits of its use than that which I… pursued under the title of a deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding." (*CpR* A XVI)

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