abstracta
Linguagem, Mente & Ação

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Editor

Vanessa Morlock

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Editorial

We proudly present the fourth Special Issue of ABSTRACTA which is dedicated to *The Possibility of Knowledge* (Clarendon Press 2007) by Quassim Cassam from Warwick University.

In *The Possibility of Knowledge,* Quassim Cassam is considering so-called how-possible questions in epistemology, how such questions arise and how they should be answered. Moreover, he "suggest[s] that epistemological how-possible questions are obstacle-dependent and that a satisfactory response to such questions must therefore be, at least in part, an obstacle-removing response. We ask how knowledge of kind K is possible when we are inclined to think that knowledge of this kind is possible but encounter apparent obstacles to its existence or acquisition. So the question is: how is knowledge of kind K possible given the factors that make it look impossible?" (p 2 of this issue)

The present issue is a result of a remarkably stimulating Kant Workshop, organized by Tobias Rosefeldt (Konstanz University) in 2008. The authors had the opportunity to discuss their questions and criticism with Quassim Cassam in order then to anticipate his replies and comments in their papers. And although some of the now presented papers are quite critical, all authors were fascinated by the density of Cassam's arguments, his lucidity in writing as well as all the subtle and hitherto overlooked distinctions.

I would like to thank, first of all, Quassim Cassam for the inspiring time we all had during the Kant Workshop at Konstanz University as well as his patience and time throughout the process of editing this volume. I am also thankful to all the other authors who made the symposium possible: Denis Bühler, Daniel Dohrn, David Lüthi, Bernhard Ritter and Simon Sauter. They did a great job.

Vanessa Morlock,

Associate Editor

June, 2009.

PRÉCIS OF "THE POSSIBILITY OF KNOWLEDGE"
(CLARENDON PRESS 2007)

Quassim Cassam

My book is about how-possible questions in epistemology, questions of the form "How is knowledge of kind K possible?". I explain how such questions arise and propose a way of answering them. I suggest that epistemological how-possible questions are obstacle-dependent and that a satisfactory response to such questions must therefore be, at least in part, an obstacle-removing response. We ask how knowledge of kind K is possible when we are inclined to think that knowledge of this kind is possible but encounter apparent obstacles to its existence or acquisition. So the question is: how is knowledge of kind K possible given the factors that make it look impossible?

Sometimes the obstacle is the lack of any means of acquiring knowledge of kind K. If we think we have this kind of knowledge then we presumably think that we have means of acquiring it.[1] We might be concerned, however, that the means we usually employ to acquire it are inadequate and that no better means are available to us. The first stage of a satisfying response to an epistemological how-possible question should therefore consist in the identification of viable means of acquiring the apparently problematic knowledge.[2] This is Level 1 of what I call a multi-levels response to the how-possible question, the level of means. Level 2 is the obstacle-removing level, the level at which we try to show that there are no insuperable obstacles to our coming to know by the suggested means. What counts as an obstacle is largely a matter what philosophers have actually found problematic about this kind of knowledge. Suppose that the obstacle takes the form of an epistemological requirement R that supposedly cannot be met. In that case, we must either show that R can be met or that it is not a genuine requirement. I call the former an obstacle-overcoming response while the latter

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[1] It might be held that self-knowledge is a kind of knowledge that we have even though there is nothing recognizable as means of acquiring it. If this is true then the obvious question to ask is: how is such a thing possible? See Cassam, forthcoming, for further discussion.

[2] I sometimes refer to means of knowing as *ways* of knowing. See Cassam (2007b) for further discussion of the notion of a way of knowing.

is an obstacle-dissipating response. Lastly, if the proposal is that it is possible to acquire knowledge of kind K by means M then a further question we can – but don't have to – ask is: what makes it possible to acquire K by M, that is, what are the *a priori* enabling conditions for acquiring K by M? This brings us to Level 3 of a multi-levels response, the level of enabling conditions.

A minimalist is someone who thinks that distinctively philosophical explanations of the possibility of knowledge cannot go beyond Level 2. Moderate anti-minimalism is the view that philosophical Level 3 explanations are possible but not necessary. Extreme anti-minimalists think that philosophical Level 3 explanations are both possible and necessary. Practitioners of various forms of naturalized epistemology who think that Level 3 questions are questions for empirical science rather than *a priori* philosophy are minimalists. Kant is an extreme anti-minimalist, and many of his most interesting claims are claims at Level 3. He takes it that perceiving is a means of knowing about the world around us and argues that categorial thinking and spatial perception are *a priori* enabling condition for the acquisition of perceptual knowledge. I defend watered down versions of these Kantian claims but my anti-minimalism is moderate rather than extreme.

My account of how-possible questions is heavily influenced by Kant's account of the possibility of geometrical knowledge. Kant asks how this kind of knowledge is possible because he thinks that (a) it is synthetic *a priori* and (b) neither of what might be regarded as the core sources of human knowledge – experience and conceptual analysis - can make it available to us. He wants an account of geometrical knowledge that respects both (a) and (b) so he begins by identifying construction in pure intuition as a pathway to this kind of knowledge.[3] Next, he argues that the fact that what we construct in intuition are individual figures is not an insuperable obstacle to the acquisition of *a priori* geometrical knowledge by this means. Finally, he tries to show that the transcendental ideality of physical space is what makes it possible for construction in intuition to be a means of coming to know its geometry both synthetically and *a priori*. In my terms, this is a multi-levels account of the possibility

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[3] What we construct are concepts. To construct a concept like *triangle* is to represent a triangle either by imagination alone or on paper. The former is construction in pure intuition. The latter is construction in empirical intuition.

of geometrical knowledge, and it is the structure of the account rather than its details that is of special interest.

Kant's multi-levels framework can be applied to many other epistemological how-possible questions. For example, some sceptics ask how knowledge of the external world is possible because they think that human beings get their knowledge of the world somehow from sense-perception and that there are certain apparently undeniable facts about sense-perception that make it difficult to understand how sense-perception could possibly work to give us knowledge of the world. According to Stroud, one such apparently undeniable fact is that 'it seems at least possible for us to perceive what we do without thereby knowing something about the world around us' (2000: 5-6). If it is true that our knowledge of the world is, in this sense, underdetermined by the evidence of our senses then it is hard to see how such knowledge is possible at all.[4]

The obvious way of dealing with this alleged difficulty is to argue that we have available to us perceptual means of knowing that do not underdetermine our knowledge of the world. Suppose that P is a proposition about the external world and that we sometimes see that P. Dretske calls this kind of seeing 'epistemic seeing'.[5] It is not possible for us to see that P without thereby knowing something about the world around us because this kind of seeing *entails* knowing. However, this observation gets us nowhere if it turns out that there are insuperable obstacles to our ever being able to see or perceive epistemically. So the next stage is to show that there are no such obstacles. Finally, we might want to say something about what makes epistemic seeing or perceiving possible. Once we have identified one or more means of knowing about the world, shown that they really are means of knowing, and explained what makes it possible to know by these means, we have answered the question "How is knowledge of the world possible?".

Other familiar how-possible questions that are amenable to a multi-levels treatment include 'How is knowledge of other minds possible?' and 'How is *a priori* knowledge possible?'. I identify perception as a means, though not the only means, of knowing what another person is thinking or feeling. I defend the idea that perception can be a source of knowledge of other minds and identify two *a priori* enabling conditions for knowing the mind of another by perceptual means. When it comes to *a*

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[4] The argument of this paragraph is a summary of Stroud (2000a).
[5] See Dretske (1969).

priori knowledge, the key is to recognize that, like empirical knowledge, it has a range of sources. I discuss three non-experiential means of knowing and explain how they work to give us *a priori* knowledge. I argue, in opposition to Kant, that it is possible to explain how non-empirical knowledge is possible without any commitment to idealism, transcendental or otherwise.

My talk of the different levels of a philosophical response to a how-possible question should not be taken too literally. As I stress in the preface to my book, it is more a matter of a satisfactory response to a how-possible question having to do several different and interconnected things in the course of a single evolving enquiry. Talk of the different levels of a response to a how-possible question is simply a convenient way of describing and keeping track of the different aspects of such an enquiry. The multi-levels model is an attempt to capture the explanatory structure of Kant's approach to one of his central how-possible questions, and I argue that mainstream epistemology has a lot to learn from Kant's conception of what needs to be done to answer his question.

While my response to epistemological how-possible questions is clearly Kantian in inspiration it nevertheless parts company with Kant on one major issue. The disagreement concerns the role of transcendental arguments in connection with how-possible questions. Rightly or wrongly, Kant has been read as maintaining that an effective way of tackling such questions is to argue transcendentally. Suppose that the question is: how is outer experience – perceptual knowledge of spatial objects- possible? A transcendental response to this question is one that identifies the necessary conditions for outer experience or tries to demonstrate that there must be outer experience because without it something else whose existence cannot be doubted – say inner experience- would not be possible. My claim is that neither style of transcendental argument can be said to explain how outer experience is possible.

Quassim Cassam

University of Warwick

q.cassam@warwick.ac.uk

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HOW IS EPISTEMIC REASONING POSSIBLE?

Denis Bühler

In his "Philosophical Explanations", Robert Nozick introduces a way of thinking about 'How Possible?–questions' or HPQs. He claims that what sparks this kind of questions are obstacles to the very thing the possibility of which is put under scrutiny. Naturally, what he takes to be an eminent task of the philosopher dealing with such a HPQ is to cope in one of several different ways with that obstacle.

Quassim Cassam extends that approach to HPQs in epistemology[6], but broadens and slightly modifies it. On the one hand, Cassam claims to give us the meaning of those questions. On the other hand, he produces an account of what a good answer to those questions would have to look like. To this extent, Cassam broadens Nozick´s account. He modifies it by adding an emphasis on means, sources or pathways to knowledge as an integral part of an answer to a HPQ; and he opposes Nozick in arguing for what he calls moderate anti-minimalism, a position that will be introduced shortly.

The main objectives of his book, as I understand it, are then to show (i) that his account of HPQs, their answers, and his position of a moderate anti-minimalist are correct – I will call this and the theses related to it the 3-levels-model or 3LM; (ii) to argue for these claims with a view to Kantian themes, especially transcendental arguments and their relation to HPQs; and finally (iii) to "put the three levels approach to HPQs to work in dealing with specific HPQs"(p.vi)[7].

In what follows I will ignore objective (ii) and instead concentrate on (i) and (iii) in the context of Cassam's discussion of a priori knowledge. I will try to show in what sense I don´t find Cassam's discussion of reasoning as a source of a priori knowledge very satisfying. It will turn out that this has to do with several difficulties that I have trying to understand Cassam's account of HPQs. I will conclude by pointing out how I think this might jeopardize the value of the 3LM.

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[6] I will henceforth mean HPQs in epistemology when talking about HPQs without qualification.
[7] Unless otherwise indicated, citations are from Cassam (2007).

1.

Let me start with a short presentation of the main tenets of Cassam's 3LM. HPQs are of the form: "How is x possible?" Popular HPQs are questions about the possibility of knowledge of the external world, of other minds, or a priori knowledge. All these questions, as Cassam understands them, presuppose the possibility of x, but wonder how the possibility of x can be accounted for or explained in the light of some specific obstacle to the possibility of x (p.2).

An answer to a HPQ, accordingly, has to explain the possibility of x in the light of some obstacle. A good answer, however, has to obey the 3LM. The latter posits three different levels such an answer should or can proceed at. On Level 1, it is required of the answer that a means, route, source or pathway (p.5, 9) to the suspicious kind of knowledge be "identified (p.8)." Level 2 deals with the alleged obstacle by either dissipating it or overcoming it (p.2). Finally, on level 3 a further explanatory question can be asked with respect to the means identified on level 1: what makes the acquisition of knowledge by the proposed means possible? This question, says Cassam, asks for a "positive explanation (p.9)" of a certain kind of knowledge, i.e. the identification of enabling conditions for knowing by the proposed means (p.10). Enabling conditions can be identified in an a priori or a posteriori way. I will come back to this later. Cassam's moderate anti-minimalism consists in the claim that giving a level 3-answer to a HPQ on a priori grounds is possible, but not necessary if we want to produce a good or satisfactory answer to the HPQ (p.10, 35ff.). Note that Nozick, for one, seems to be convinced that some kind of positive explanation is not only possible but mandatory[8].

As far as I can see, Cassam nowhere specifies what counts as a means, route, source or pathway to knowledge. Nor does he explicate what the identification of such a means etc. would come down to. The same holds for the notions of an obstacle or an enabling condition, as we will see later. This is disappointing, as putting the focus on means to knowledge seems to be a prima facie interesting move.

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[8] He writes: "The task of explaning how p is possible *is not exhausted* by the *rearguard* action of meeting arguments from its apparent excluders. There remains the question of what facts or principles might give rise to p. Here the philosopher searches for deeper explanatory principles ... To produce this possible explanation of p is, by seeing one way p is given rise to, to see how it can be true. "How is it possible that p?" This way: such and such facts are possible and they constitute an explanatory route to p" (Nozick, 1981. p.11. My emphasis).

A similar ambiguity can be found with regard to the purpose of the 3LM. Cassam is very eager to point out that talking about different levels of an answer to a HPQ "shouldn´t be taken too literally (p.vi)". This can be easily understood. For think of the following scenario (or something similar). We ask, how is knowledge possible? The alleged obstacle to knowledge may be the possibility of a génie malin, the possibility of error or merely the fact that we are feeble characters that are prone to failure. An answer to that challenge might consist in a proof of the possibility of knowledge from some theological premise. If this is an intelligible example of a HPQ, then I find it hard to identify the respective levels, especially the role that is to be played by the means that leads to knowledge.

But doesn't it then remain unclear what status the 3LM is supposed to have? For if there are HPQs that can be understood and answered without obeying the 3LM, that discredits its status as the only correct way of dealing with those questions. And if both the central notions and the assignment of different levels in dealing with a HPQ are vague, then we have to find a way to make sure that the proposed method does not collapse into the platitudinous. How then are we to understand the claims connected with Cassam's 3LM? Bearing in mind both that the claims should not be too universal and that the notions should not be too stretchable, I want to suggest the following: The 3LM is a good heuristic means to make progress in the scrutiny of HPQs. If we stick to that model, we stand pretty good chances of answering a HPQ to our (and possibly, the opponent's) satisfaction.

2.

It is now time to turn to Cassam's application of his model to a priori knowledge, and especially, a priori knowledge from reasoning. The purpose of this application is to "cast at least as much light on the question "How is a priori knowledge possible?" as on other epistemological how-possible-questions" (p.188). The obstacle to that possibility is, according to Cassam, the combination of the claim that any knowledge is knowledge of facts that are independent of the knower, and the claim that any knowledge of matters of fact has experience as its ultimate source (pp.191-5). A priori knowledge has been defined as "knowledge that has its source in an a priori way of coming to know"

(p.191). Accordingly, it should be impossible for there to be such a thing as a priori knowledge.

Having put the obstacle in place, Cassam names *reflection, calculation* and *reasoning* as non-experiential sources of knowledge, hence, as possible means to a priori knowledge. The bulk of the chapter (pp.195-210) is then concerned with dealing with the obstacle by answering whether these means are really means to *knowing* anything, to knowing about *matters of fact*, and whether they are indeed *non-experiential*.

I am mainly interested in reasoning as a source of a priori knowledge. But it is only fair to point out that Cassam says very little about what others have thought of as one of the most important means to knowledge[9], and especially a priori knowledge. All we get as an "identification" of this means to knowledge on level 1 of the 3LM is an example: inferring that Blair lives in Downing Street from the facts that he is Prime Minister and that Prime Ministers live in Downing Street (pp.197-8).

We get nothing on level 2. Here Cassam almost[10] exclusively deals with calculation as a source of knowledge. The main obstacle to calculation's being a way of acquiring knowledge he discusses is Stewart Cohen's principle KR: "A potential knowledge source K can yield knowledge for S only if S knows that K is reliable" (p.201). Cassam overcomes this obstacle to calculation by pointing out that we can check the reliability of our mental calculations by using a calculator (p.203). I am not sure what to make of that response. Nor am I convinced that this is the only difficulty one might encounter when trying to argue for the possibility of a priori knowledge by calculation (or reasoning or reflection, for that matter – I will discuss what one might think of as another difficulty shortly). At any rate, there seems to be no simple way to deal with that obstacle in the case of reasoning. Cassam seems to accept KR as a valid challenge (p.203). He argues that it is furthermore crucial that the reliability of our means to knowledge K be established without relying on K itself (p.201). But how could this be done in the case of reasoning, given its ubiquity? No matter which way we choose to establish the reliability of K, we have to infer from some number of cases of

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[9] Cf. Boghossian (2002): "Reasoning of some sort will be involved in any putative knowledge that we might have of any high-level epistemic claim"(p.24).

[10] There is a short passage on reflection on page 204, dealing with the same objection Cassam discusses with regard to calculation. Here we are told that "if my reflection has stood the test of time and the scrutiny of others then I can know on this basis that they are reliable."

successful reasoning the reliability of the source. But then we do not only need an argument to establish what amount and types of cases we are allowed to use as a basis for inferring K´s reliability. We also need reasoning (in particular, modus ponens), to get from a number of matches between our results and the facts to the reliability of our reasoning in general. And that seems to involve just the kind of circularity Cassam has precluded from any viable answer to the challenge[11]. Unfortunately, Cassam concludes his discussion of calculation and reflection by telling us "this is as much as I propose to say in this chapter about the worry that reflection, reasoning, and calculation can't be sources of knowledge" (p.205). He goes on to briefly consider the logical empiricist's worry that a priori knowledge is vacuous, and the Quinean view that there is no genuine a priori knowledge, as any knowledge is empirically defeasible. Cassam rightly rebuts these worries by merely pointing out their implausibility (pp.206-7), and I will not go into them.

I want to save the discussion of level 3 for the next section. For now, let's put ourselves in the shoes of Boghossian. Note that I don't mean to endorse his theses. All I need for now is that we agree that his investigation is perfectly intelligible and respectable[12]. He, too, deals with the question "How is epistemic reasoning possible?"[13] And there seems to be no reason to regard the way he deals with that question as illegitimate. So what's the obstacle? For Boghossian, the obstacle to the possibility of epistemic reasoning seems to be that on the most popular theories of justification, trying to account for warrant in inference leads into trouble almost immediately. There is, then, no particular obstacle in an intuitive sense that speaks against the possibility of epistemic reasoning. Rather, the obstacle is the absence of an account of warrant-transmission in reasoning. Is this, then, a variation of the problem of sources? I don't think so. For that kind of problem is to be countered by establishing a new source of knowledge. And Boghossian doesn't do that. Instead, he uses known resources – the possession of concepts – to give an account as to how they may yield the required warrant. Thus, either Boghossian doesn't deal with a genuine obstacle to epistemic reasoning, or the absence of an account does count as an obstacle. We should keep this

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[11] This is of course reminiscent of Boghossian (2003), pp.233ff.

[12] For criticism of Boghossian (2003), see Williamson (2003).

[13] Cf. Boghossian (2003), abstract: "the paper explores the suggestion that an inferentialist account of the logical constants can help *explain how such reasoning is possible*" (my emphasis). Similarly, in Boghossian (2002): "The correct project in epistemology is to show how knowledge is possible" (60).

in mind, for it means that the notion of an obstacle has to be broadened in a way that will affect an evaluation of the general value of the 3LM.

What form does Boghossian's answer to the alleged obstacle take? It seems that his answer is the attempt at a more satisfactory and more integral account of epistemic reasoning. In what sense is it more satisfactory? In the simple sense that it accounts for the transmission of warrant and a subject's entitlement to transitions from premises to conclusions in inferences without heading towards the quick dead-ends that have been diagnosed for the other accounts. In what sense is it more integral? It gives the core of an account for epistemic reasoning both from the point of view of the philosophy of psychology – transitions from thoughts as premises to thoughts as conclusions on the basis of the possession and application of logical concepts like *conditional* – and from the epistemological perspective – transmission of warrant from justified premises to conclusions via employment of non-defective concepts, which renders the transmission blameless and hence entitles the reasoner to it[14].

If this description of what Boghossian does has something to it, then it would seem that it supports one of the general emphases that Cassam makes: an emphasis on the means to knowledge. Giving a good and satisfactory answer to a HPQ would then at least in some cases have more to do with identifying a means to knowledge than shows even in Cassam's own discussion. For here, we lack even the preliminary attempt at producing an integral account of epistemic reasoning that we encountered in his discussion of epistemic perception[15]. Boghossian answers the HPQ by giving an (allegedly) more satisfactory and integral answer to the how-question that Cassam introduced as level 1 of his 3LM (p.5ff.). If this is what Cassam has in mind when he writes about the "identification" of a means, then it can rightly be asked why he spends so little time giving such an account of epistemic reasoning. If this is not what Cassam has in mind, then this casts doubt on the usefulness of the 3LM. For do we not here have a case where an integral account of the means to knowledge is central to the endeavour? And should not this case be captured by the 3LM?

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[14] I'm inclined to go even farther. I think the most fascinating project in epistemology and the philosophy of psychology with respect to epistemic reasoning is giving an integrated account of epistemic reasoning which would cover such different things as the role reliable or rational processes, understanding, active control and mental agency, subjective and objective rationality play. It's the absence of such an integrated account that seems to inspire the respective questions. Cf. Burge (2005), p.21 for the case of perception.

[15] Where Cassam relied on Dretske´s account of epistemic perception, cf. p.27.

More generally, applying the 3LM to some HPQ seems to make sense only if we have a grip on the means that is supposed to play a central role in the discussion. That presupposes an understanding of the means. I think that this understanding should include having an idea of the cognitive activity that´s going on. But it should surely imply having some understanding of the epistemological aspects of the means to knowledge, that is, having some understanding of how the subject is warranted in using that means. This seems not only the minimum we need in order to make sure that we know what we´re talking about. It also seems essential in order to find obstacles to the possibility of knowledge by the proposed means. For how could we find an obstacle to x without having some understanding of x?

3.

Finally, I would like to discuss Cassam's conception of level 3 of his 3LM in the context of epistemic reasoning. I think that a similar vagueness can be found here.

I think we can detect a certain tension in even the few remarks on level 3 explanations that we get. There are several aspects to a level 3 explanation. Thus we are told that (a) what is being answered on level 3 is a "*what-makes-it-possible* question rather than a how-possible question. How-possible questions are obstacle-dependent but what-makes-it-possible questions are *explanation-seeking*. What they seek is not a way round some specific obstacle but, as it were, a positive explanation of the possibility of acquiring a certain kind of knowledge by certain specified means" (p.16). Next (b) we are told that two different things may be involved in a level 3 explanation. The explanation may be a type A explanation, an explanation "that seeks to explain the possible *occurrence* of a certain cognitive activity" (ibid). Or it may be a type B explanation: what makes an explanation a type B explanation is "that it seeks to explain the *epistemological significance* of a certain cognitive activity" (ibid). The nature of type A explanations is further specified (c) as giving enabling conditions of the cognitive activity M (for means) in question. Those are held to be a subclass of necessary conditions for M. They are hence not just any necessary conditions for M, but are "more specific" (p.17), and they are background conditions. Cassam doesn't further explicate what distinguishes background enabling conditions from other necessary conditions for M. He refers to Burge's usage of that terminology, but doesn't give an

interpretation of the passage he refers to (pp.17-8). The nature of type B explanations (d) isn't really specified at all – and it seems that we find different formulations of their purpose. We have already encountered one in (b). Later we read that it consists in giving enabling conditions for the acquisition of knowledge by some means, where it's not clear whether that´s the same thing (p.18, 44ff.).

Before getting back to exegesis, let me note the tension I have been talking about. It is the tension between requiring a positive explanation of how some means to knowledge may yield knowledge and giving necessary conditions for that means as an answer. Cassam himself is eager in his discussion of transcendental arguments to point out that giving necessary conditions for something doesn't by itself yield an explanation; worse, it is not to be expected that some positive explanation for x could consist (unless by incident) in giving necessary conditions for x[16]. A positive explanation of x could, for example, consist in giving sufficient conditions for x. Suppose it was right that knowledge is true justified belief. Giving these sufficient conditions for a belief´s being an instance of knowledge might be a more adequate explanation of what knowledge is than giving some necessary condition like a belief's being a belief, or its being of some subject matter. So, at least, the claim that a positive explanation of x should be given in terms of enabling conditions is in need of elaboration.

Is this at all important to Cassam's endeavour? Can´t he just claim that we have an intuitive grasp of the concept of an enabling condition and that´s that? Yes and no. The issue is important, for it plays a crucial role for Cassam's main tenets. The notion of an enabling condition is an integral part of the 3LM; it is at the heart of Cassam's moderate AM, which in turn gives the main philosophical bite to his methodological claims, and it plays an important role, or so one might think, in his discussion of specific problems. And it's just because of this important role that we need a more explicit grasp of that concept, for how should we otherwise assess Cassam's claims?

But doesn't the reference to Burge do the work we´re asking for? I don't think so. First of all, Burge doesn´t need a very explicit notion of enabling conditions for his argument in *Content Preservation* to work; for him, it's rather a matter of making a distinction between something´s being a part of the justification for p, and something's being necessary for that justification to obtain, but not being part of the justification.

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[16] Cf. Cassam, Chapter. 2

And he succeeds in making that distinction plausible. Second, it seems to me that Cassam misreads Burge's proposal. For the latter writes that in the case of reasoning, "memory´s preserving the results of previous reasoning ... does not add to the justificational force of the reasoning. It is rather a background condition for the reasoning's success" (p.463). So the distinction is between what is part of the account of some warrant as opposed to background conditions that are not part of that account, but belong to the conditions that make the success of some cognitive activity possible. But isn´t that just what Cassam required of type B explanations under (b)? There he said he wanted a positive explanation of the epistemological significance of some cognitive activity. But that just seems to be explaining what makes it possible for some cognitive activity to be a source of knowledge, and, on some conceptions of knowledge, to explain the warrant that derives from that activity. If this is right, then Cassam counts among enabling conditions precisely what Burge excludes from them. This would, then, obscure the notion of a level 3 explanation even more.

It seems a good idea to have a look at some examples. For the case of epistemic seeing we are told that certain physiological or environmental conditions can be thought of as type A enabling conditions[17]. Furthermore, the perception of space and the possession of empirical concepts are adduced as type A explanations which can be established by a priori reflection (p.39). Now, if these claims were true, then all that would follow, or so it seems, is that these are necessary conditions for epistemic seeing. It is not obvious in what sense they have a special explanatory status, i.e. constitute a positive explanation of epistemic seeing.

As to type B conditions on epistemic seeing, we are told that the task is to explain the transition (p.44) from

    (1) S sees that b is P.
to
    (2) S knows that b is P.

Now that explanation goes as follows: We suppose that it is right that the perception of space is an a priori enabling condition for the perception of objects, hence a type A

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[17] On p.38 Cassam claims that since they are causal they cannot be established by armchair reflection – I do not see how that follows.

enabling condition for epistemic seeing. "But anything that is an enabling condition for the perception of objects is also going to be a type B enabling condition for epistemic seeing, given that object perception is involved in the acquisition of knowledge by primary epistemic seeing. What we now have, therefore, is the possibility that the perception of space is both a type A and a type B enabling condition for epistemic seeing" (p.46).

This seems confused. First of all, intuitively there seems to be an in principle distinction between explaining the possibility of some psychological activity and explaning the normative force of it, where I take it that "normative force" is a natural reading of "epistemological significance". Second, how can it be that something that is an explanation of (1) can eo ipso be an explanation of our entitlement to the transition from (1) to (2)? Granted, if something is a necessary condition on seeing that b is P, and if we want to give necessary conditions for knowing that b is P via seeing b, then it seems plausible that necessary conditions for seeing that b is P have to be necessary conditions for knowing that b is P. But that seems to be an entirely different question. There is, then, a further tension between (b) and (d). If a type B explanation is just a matter of producing necessary conditions for knowing p via M, then it´s unclear what that has to do with producing a positive explanation of M´s being a source of knowledge and explaining its epistemological significance. If it is not, then it seems that the characterization and examples that Cassam gives for type B explanations are suspicious.

Something similar can be said for Cassam's level 3 explanation of epistemic reasoning. We should expect the request for such an explanation to have something like the form: give the explanation of the transition from

(3) S reasons from pi...pn to c.

to

(4) S knows that c.

But this question, unfortunately, is never posed. Rather, Cassam focusses on reflection: "what are the background enabling conditions for reflection to be a source of a priori knowledge?" (p.215).

His answer goes as follows. "Understanding, or having a grasp of the relevant concepts, is both a type A and a type B enabling condition for the acquisition of a priori knowledge by reflection or calculation" (p.216)[18]. In response to that information, Cassam acknowledges, it has to be asked how concept possession can allow that the understanding ground the acquisition of a priori knowledge (p.217). The answer he gives to that question is that this "is only because the concept red is tied to the individuation of the colour red, and the concept green is tied to the individuation of the colour green, that reflection can yield the understanding-based a priori knowledge that nothing can be red all over and green all over at the same time" (p.217). Cassam hence thinks that some version of externalism about concepts is the answer to the above question on level 3 (p.218).

I don´t understand how this can be a level 3 answer in the stronger sense. If externalism about concepts is correct, then in some sense it may a necessary condition on having concepts. But this doesn't constitute a positive explanation of how reflection on some proposition p can yield knowledge that p (if it's just because there are so many cases where reflection doesn't yield the knowledge we strive after).

And it certainly isn't a satisfactory answer in the case of epistemic reasoning. Here, too, it is utterly unclear how the information that externalism about concepts is in some sense a necessary condition on concept-possession might possibly constitute an explanation of the entitlement involved in transitions from (3) to (4). That some view about the nature of contents cannot just like that be an answer to our epistemological questions about warrant in inference seems to be one of the points agreed upon in the debate between Boghossian and Williamson about the transmission of warrant in epistemic reasoning[19]. Neither the cognitive activity of epistemic reasoning, nor our entitlement stemming from it, are explained by merely pointing out that concepts should be conceived of externalistically.

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[18] Is having a grasp of some concept the same as having the concept? Cassam could then reason that the cognitive activity we want to give type A necessary conditions for *just is* having the relevant concept(s). I find that implausible (on the basis of (Burge (1979)). But wouldn´t that disqualify as an enabling condition, just as being a bachelor disqualifies as an enabling condition for being an unmarried man? And if it´s something additional, doesn´t the picture Cassam earlier endorses of concept possession – where he seems to allow that we can induce concept posession by manipulation of a subject´s brain states (pp.147-8) – invalidate this argument?
Note that, once more, Cassam here ignores the possibility of epistemic reasoning as an explanandum.
[19] Cf. Boghossian, Williamson (2003). Williamson seems to go even farther in doubting that a "question in theory of knowledge can be reduced to questions in the theory of thought and meaning" (p.47).

I think Cassam's account of level 3 of his 3LM therefore faces the following difficulty. Either he chooses to be content with type B explanations as merely giving necessary conditions. Then his distinction between type A and type B conditions collapses, and it is not clear what explanatory role or value level 3 explanations have. Or he endorses the stronger reading of type B explanations. That would yield an interesting project, but make it difficult to see how what Cassam himself presents as level 3 explanations can be satisfactory.

4.

I find the latter option more appealing. But to my eyes, it would put the whole 3LM in jeopardy. For it seems that an account of the epistemological significance of some cognitive activity just belongs to any account of that cognitive activity, epistemologically conceived. Or how else are we to spell out Cassam's emphasis on pathways to knowledge? If this is right, then either the distinction between level 1 and 3 collapses, because we couldn't give an account of a means to knowledge on level 1 without also giving an account of its epistemological significance, which is alleged to be a level 3 explanation; or a type B level 3 explanation is necessary in any case for a 3LM answer to be satisfying. It would thus not have to be seen as part of identifying the means, but nevertheless be an inevitable ingredient in any attempt to answer a HPQ. That, however, would invalidate moderate anti-minimalism.

Let me therefore sum up my worries: (I) Is chapter 6 intended to constitute an attempt at a fully satisfactory answer to the HPQs concerning a priori knowledge? If so, why does it lack a discussion of epistemic reasoning? Why does it ignore what others seem to conceive of as the need to give an *account* of epistemic reasoning qua means to a priori knowledge? (II) Where does Cassam's discussion leave the notions of a level 3 answer and type A/B explanations? Are we to think of them as mere necessary conditions for some means or does Cassam indeed endorse the more demanding view, according to which a level 3 explanation aims at explaining the epistemological significance of some activity? Wouldn't it be wrong to leave their explication and assessment to intuition? How does the discussion on level 3 relate to identifying a means to knowledge? (III) Where does all this leave the 3LM? The crucial notions that define that model are ambiguous: level 3 type B explanations are either demanding and

thus threaten both the value of Cassam's discussion of specific HPQs and his conception of moderate anti-minimalism (on this reading they would rather suggest adapting an extremely anti-minimalist position); or they consist in giving necessary conditions and are thus explanatorily unrevealing. Level 2 obstacles and their removals allow either for obstacles as broadly conceived as the lack of an account – then we can safely claim that the 3LM applies to a vast range of questions and problems, and it's not obvious how it can be of special heuristic help; or Cassam has a precise notion of what counts as obstacles, and the lack of an account of some means isn't among them – then, what is that notion? And, if it doesn't capture endeavours like Boghossian's, how can it be positively assessed when it comes down to heuristics? It remains unclear what it takes to identify a means to knowledge on level 1.

Therefore it seems, in the end, dubitable whether Cassam manages to attain his goals (i) and (iii) from the introduction. I find his discussion of epistemic reasoning as a specific epistemological HPQ deeply unsatisfying and have given reasons for this. That jeopardizes his claim (iii). I have furthermore argued that his conception of a 3LM is either too broad to be of any special heuristic help, or it is to narrow. In any case, it is it is too vague. So, even on the charitable reading from section I, this jeopardizes Cassam's claim (i)[20].

Denis Bühler

Konstanz University

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

Daniel Dohrn

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

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[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

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[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.

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[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

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[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

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[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

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[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?

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[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

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[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.).

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[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.

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[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

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[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.

Daniel Dohrn

Konstanz University

Daniel_Dohrn@yahoo.com

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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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CASSAM ON THE POSSIBILITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS

David Lüthi

In the Preface and chapter 1 of *The Possibility of Knowledge*, Quassim Cassam proposes what might be termed a general framework for both (i) understanding and (ii) tackling epistemological how-possible questions (henceforth EHPQs): questions of the form 'How is x possible?', where x is some type of knowledge. Cassam takes this framework to embody 'a version of transcendental epistemology that is different from the standard version' (vii), where by the 'standard version' he means an approach that answers EHPQs by identifying, by means of transcendental arguments, necessary conditions for the existence of the type of knowledge whose possibility is questioned. Indeed, in chapter 2, Cassam goes further in claiming that his approach is not only different from, but superior to the transcendental argument approach.

In the paragraphs below, I take issue with these claims. First, I argue that Cassam's framework fails to apply as smoothly as he would have us believe to the example EHPQs he discusses. In its present version, Cassam's framework seems to me contrived and more obfuscating than enlightening. In the second section, I suggest that EHPQs come in (at least) two varieties, and claim that whereas a cleaned up version of Cassam's framework might perhaps do justice to the one variety, it could not displace the transcendental argument approach with regard to the other variety.

1. Epistemological how-possible questions à la Cassam

In this first section, I briefly review both the general recipe Cassam proposes for the interpretation and treatment of EHPQs and the specific interpretation and treatment he gives to a range of example cases in accordance with this recipe. As will soon transpire, Cassam succeeds in making his framework look plausible and helpful only by applying generous doses of imprecision, inconsequence and insouciance. On a more careful

analysis, it turns out that even Cassam's own example cases of EHPQs are too disparate probably to fit into any single structural schema, let alone Cassam's.

First then to the general schema Cassam envisages for any interpretation of and response to an EHPQ. The first thing to take account of in connection with EHPQs, according to Cassam, is their *obstacle-dependence*: Cassam claims that when we ask 'How is x possible?', it is the *apparent impossibility of x in the face of some perceived obstacle* that 'gives bite' to the question (cf. v, 2). 'We ask how x is possible when there appears to be an obstacle to the existence of x. We don't ask how x is possible if there is no perceived obstacle…' (2). Now I think one could have immediate doubts about the correctness of this observation, and I will formulate such doubts below in sct. 2; first, however, let's see what other generalisations Cassam propounds.

His next suggestion is that any EHPQ demands a 'multi-levels response' (vi, 9f.) that proceeds on three levels: on level 1, a 'means response' must be given, i. e. one or several means of acquiring the kind of knowledge whose possibility is questioned must be identified. Cassam (14) emphasises that the means to be indicated here need not be 'unique' means – the existence of further suitable means besides the proposed ones need not be excluded. What matters is that one or more 'practical' means of acquiring the knowledge in question are named. This point about EHPQs asking for practical rather than unique means prepares the ground for Cassam's main objection to the transcendental argument approach, to which I will return in section 2.

After such identification of a (number of) means on level 1, the next step, on level 2, must be to remove any 'intuitive, pre-existing obstacle' (20) there might be to the proper functioning of the means proposed on level 1 as a means to acquiring the relevant knowledge. In other words, any immediate qualms there might be about the utility of the proposed means must be allayed. This can be done either by *overcoming* the obstacle – i. e., showing that what the obstacle requires can actually be met by the proposed means – or by *dissipating* the obstacle – i. e., showing that the demands it makes are unjustified (cf. 2).

Finally, on level 3, less obvious and intuitive 'enabling conditions' are to be identified that must be fulfilled if the means proposed on level 1 is to generate the desired knowledge. Cassam distinguishes between two kinds of explanation that can be given on level 3: 'type A explanations', which specify relevant necessary conditions *for*

the very existence of the means; and 'type B explanations', which specify relevant necessary conditions *for the means to generate the kind of knowledge in question* (cf. 16). To judge from various passages of the text (e. g. 16ff., 40), Cassam seems to think that type A explanations can be either empirical or philosophical, whereas type B explanations are exclusively philosophical. Note, however, that any type A explanation must, trivially, also be a type B explanation: if condition c must be fulfilled for the means m to exist, then c must also be fulfilled for m to be able to generate the relevant knowledge (as Cassam notes himself on p. 46; cf. Bühler, this issue, for a sharp analysis of a whole range of problems surrounding Cassam's notion of an enabling condition). (Cassam furthermore uses level 3 to distinguish between two kinds of epistemologists (cf. 19): 'minimalists', who hold that the philosopher's job is done after level 2, and 'anti-minimalists', who think that philosophical level 3 answers are also necessary ('extreme anti-minimalism'), or at least possible ('moderate anti-minimalism'). This distinction can be ignored for my purposes.)

So much for Cassam's general structural schema for understanding and responding to EHPQs. Let's see then how he envisages the instantiation of this structure in specific EHPQs. I first turn to Cassam's account of Kant's EHPQ regarding synthetic a priori knowledge. It strongly appears that this is the guiding example Cassam had at the back of his mind when devising his general schema. In any event, it would seem to be the one case where the schema fits best; still, as we shall see, the difficulties start already here.

Kant's question 'How is synthetic a priori knowledge possible?' (henceforth HPsap) would indeed appear to be 'obstacle-dependent' much in the sense introduced above: Kant wonders about the possibility of synthetic a priori knowledge in the face of the obstacle that there seems to exist no means by which such knowledge could be acquired. For Kant, experience and conceptual analysis are the two basic sources of human knowledge, but neither can yield synthetic a priori knowledge (cf. 11). So HPsap is motivated by the obstacle that there appears to be no means to synthetic a priori knowledge – a 'problem of sources', as Cassam (12) calls it.

Note, however, that this is an obstacle that obtains, so to speak, at a level 0 that is not recognised by Cassam; it is an obstacle that is removed *by giving the means response on level 1* ('problem of *means*' would actually have been a more coherent

label for it than 'problem of sources'). It is thus a new type of obstacle – obtaining at a new level 0 – that is to be distinguished from the obstacles to be dealt with on level 2, which are supposed to be obstacles to the utility of the means proposed on level 1. This distinction between two types of obstacles would seem to be fairly obvious. Cassam, however, fails to draw it, and we shall see that this failure helps to make his examples look more uniform than they are.

Given that the obstacle on which HPsap 'depends' is a lack of means, it *does* seem sensible to give a means response, as prescribed by Cassam's schema. The means of acquiring geometrical knowledge (the specific kind of synthetic a priori knowledge in question) that Kant himself proposes is that of 'construction in pure intuition' (12). Kant then goes on to identify as an obstacle to the utility of this means the fact that any particular construction in pure intuition is singular, while geometrical propositions are general (what Cassam calls the 'problem of universality' (14)). This is again in line with Cassam's schema in so far as we have here an obstacle to be removed on level 2. I'm not sure, however, how 'intuitive and pre-existing' this obstacle really was for Kant. I admit I do not know, but I would imagine that the 'problem of universality' only occurred to him while pondering the mechanics of his means. In my view, if there is anything like an intuitive and pre-existing obstacle playing a role in connection with HPsap, it is the absence of means, i. e. the level 0 obstacle. In any event, I would guess that it was *this* obstacle rather than the problem of universality that drove Kant to ask HPsap.

Having removed the 'problem of universality' on level 2 (according to Cassam, roughly by proposing that 'it is the fact that construction is a rule-governed activity that makes it possible for geometry to discern "the universal in the particular"' (15)), Kant moves on to level 3, where he gives a type B explanation by identifying 'the fact that space itself is an "*a priori* intuition"' (18) as an enabling condition for construction in pure intuition to generate geometrical knowledge. This once again fits Cassam's schema: Kant discusses an enabling condition that must be fulfilled if the means proposed on level 1 is to generate the relevant knowledge. A question that can be raised, however – and that Cassam indeed himself raises (cf. 20f.) – is what distinguishes this level 3 response (this explanation of the power of construction in pure intuition to generate geometrical knowledge in terms of the ideality of space) from the obstacle

removal on level 2 (which amounts to nothing but a further explanation of the power of construction in pure intuition to generate geometrical knowledge, this time in terms of the rule-governedness of construction in intuition). Cassam argues that the difference is just that in the latter case, we deal with an intuitive, pre-existing obstacle, whereas the gap between the mental activity of construction in pure intuition and the prima facie mind-independent nature of physical space does not constitute an intuitive obstacle, but only *becomes* an obstacle once we start thinking about enabling conditions. My objections to this are (i) we've seen that the intuitiveness/pre-existence of the problem of universality is doubtful; and (ii) *if* the problem of universality can be regarded as intuitive, I don't see why the gap between mental construction and physical space should be any less so, be it for Kant or anyone else.

Already with what I think is his prototype case, then, Cassam gets into trouble. The example suggests that his general schema misses a distinction between two types of obstacles, one to be removed on level 1, the other on level 2. Moreover, it puts into question how intuitive the latter type of obstacles must be, and whether the distinction between levels 2 and 3 has any force. That would seem bad enough; but things get worse with other examples.

Chronologically the first case Cassam puts up for discussion in the text is: 'How is knowledge of the external world possible?' (HPew). Now, what strikes me immediately about this question is that a means response would seem totally beside the point here. The asker of HPew surely isn't asking for means, but whether the obvious means of acquiring knowledge of the external world really *do* generate such knowledge. *That* is how HPew must be taken.

This also entails that HPew is obstacle-dependent in a very different sense than HPsap is. The obstacle in the latter case was a lack of means – an obstacle to be removed by a means response on level 1. With HPew, in contrast, there simply isn't any such 'problem of sources'. Rather, what motivates the question must be some obstacle to the *utility of the obvious means* – in the terms of Cassam's schema, an obstacle to be removed on level 2.

At this point, Cassam might want to object that his theory of EHPQs is not about their *psychology*, but about their *logic*. Thus, although *the asker* of HPew may be *motivated* not by the absence of means, but by *worries* about the suitability of the well-

known means, it is still the case that from a strictly logical point of view, a complete response to HPew would include a means response. My reaction to this would be that apart from the fact that Cassam appears to be talking psychology throughout the discussion of his schema (in any case, he nowhere makes any such distinction between the psychology and the logic of EHPQs), it is obvious that while the maneouver might work for HPew, it could not work for the next example, HPpk (cf. below), where to give a means response is pointless not only from the psychological, but also from the logical point of view.

So back to my main line of argument. Cassam himself actually seems to sense the awkwardness of a means response to HPew, and also that the obstacle that 'gives bite' to HPew this time is one on level 2, when he lengthily explains (5f.) that the 'obvious answer' to HPew would be that there are means like 'talking to people, reading newspapers, doing Google searches', but that the problem is that the most basic means of all is perception, and that this is a problem because there are obstacles to sense perception. The conclusion he draws, however, is not that a means response in the case of HPew is redundant, but that it cannot be the whole story: 'all that the proposed means response to (HPew) does is to shift the focus of discussion from this question to another how-possible question, namely: (HPpk) How is perceptual knowledge possible?' (6).

In short, then, on Cassam's story, giving a means response to HPew will inevitably lead us to HPpk, which subsequently demands a full-blown multi-levels response in its own turn. My story, in contrast, would be that what the asker of HPew asks (or means to ask) just *is* HPpk from the beginning. Now, I don't really care much whether you prefer Cassam's or my story. But do note that on Cassam's, it becomes strictly speaking impossible to give a multi-levels response to HPew: such a response to HPew necessarily breaks off after level 1 – anything that follows after this level is a response to HPpk, and to HPew at best 'by implication' (8). On Cassam's own account of HPew, then, the general schema does not apply smoothly to it. On my account, a response to HPew is just identical to a response to HPpk.

So how does Cassam's general schema do with regard to HPpk? No better, I'm afraid. For as already signalised above, the pointlessness of a means response is even more acute in this case: after all, the means to the knowledge whose possibility is questioned here is mentioned in the very question. That is why a means response is

awkward even from what I called a strictly logical perspective above. This suggests, for one thing, that what is needed, rather than a means response, is again a removal of obstacles, on level 2, to the obvious means. Moreover, it casts doubt on Cassam's claim that level 1 means are practical rather than unique.

Cassam here actually takes some pains to uphold the validity of his schema by claiming that pointing to a *specific mode* of perception (seeing, feeling, etc.) would make for an intelligent means response to HPpk (cf. 7 and 8). Now, I think that's just not true. Such a response would not be intelligent, but entirely useless, and actually suggest that the respondent *hasn't understood* the question. Again, Cassam seems to sense this, given that he later returns to taking perception in general as the relevant means (cf. 24), and quickly moves on to identifying obstacles to this means and removing them on level 2.

As such an obstacle to perception, Cassam identifies what he calls 'Stroud's U' (cf. 24f., Stroud 2000 and 2004). From Cassam's presentation, it doesn't become clear what Stroud's U exactly amounts to, and unfortunately, Stroud himself isn't any clearer. Sometimes he seems to be talking *perceptual relativity* – the fairly straightforward point that what we perceive is compatible with various possibilities regarding what is the case. Sometimes he seems to have the stronger sceptical claim in mind that perception may at best generate the belief, but not the knowledge that the external world exists. Be that as it may, note that on either reading, Stroud's U, just like Kant's problem of universality, is hardly an 'intuitive, pre-existent' obstacle to perception. Rather, it is a more or less sophisticated objection from a trained philosopher.

Cassam next proposes to dissipate the obstacle posed by Stroud's U by means of Dretske's (1969) notion of *epistemic seeing*. Now, I can't refrain from briefly digressing here to point out that in my view, this cannot possibly work. Under either interpretation of Stroud's U, Dretske's epistemic seeing is of no force whatsoever against it (and isn't designed to be): for Dretske includes among the necessary conditions for epistemically seeing that p the condition that p is true. So epistemic seeing is only present where it's clear from the start that what is seen is true, and therefore, the notion of epistemic seeing totally begs the question Stroud's U poses as an obstacle to the possibility of perceptual knowledge.

However, my focus is not on the content, but on the form of Cassam's response to HPpk, and as far as this form goes, it complies with the general schema on level 2: Stroud's U poses an obstacle to perception as a means to perceptual knowledge, and this obstacle (thinks Cassam) can be removed with the help of Dretske's notion of epistemic seeing.

From here on, Cassam's discussion gets rather convoluted. On p. 28, he presents three 'reasons why one might fail to be convinced by this attempt at obstacle dissipation' (i.e. the attempt to dissipate Stroud's U by means of epistemic perception). Two of these, (a) and (b), are essentially obstacles to the utility of epistemic perception as a means to perceptual knowledge. Now, given that epistemic perception is the tool Cassam uses on level 2 to dissipate the obstacle posed by Stroud's U, (a) and (b) turn out to be something like second-order obstacles: obstacles to the utility of a tool used for obstacle removal on level 2. The removal *of these second-order obstacles*, in turn, which Cassam undertakes on pp. 28-34, would therefore appear still to belong to level 2, or, perhaps more precisely, to some new level 2′ that is embedded within level 2. In any case, we have here a new component in a response to an EHPQ that is nowhere captured in Cassam's general schema.

Reason (c), finally, is presented by Cassam as asking for explanations of (i) what makes epistemic perception possible and (ii) what makes it possible for epistemic perception to generate perceptual knowledge – and these of course 'are questions about enabling conditions' (35). Now, according to the general schema, enabling conditions belong to level 3, and that is where Cassam believes to find himself at this point. However, the enabling conditions we are dealing with here do not concern the means identified on level 1 (as the general schema requires and as is the case in the example of Kant's HPsap): they do not concern perception, but *epistemic perception*, which only enters the stage on level 2. So once again, where we really find ourselves here is not on level 3, but still on level 2, or level 2′.

In short, then, on careful scrutiny, HPpk (and, 'by implication', HPew) fails to fit Cassam's general schema in several ways: it doesn't demand a level 1 means response; it puts into question Cassam's claim that means are not unique, but practical; the response Cassam proposes on level 2 includes elements nowhere specified in the

general schema; and Cassam's response, despite discussing enabling conditions, never really reaches level 3.

After these fairly detailed, and, I take it, rather exhausting reconstructions of Cassam's account of HPsap, HPew and HPpk, let me speed things up a little with the remaining examples 'How is knowledge of other minds possible?' (HPom) and 'How is a priori knowledge possible?' (HPapk).

Let's turn to the latter first. On the one hand, the case of HPapk parallels that of HPpk in that askers surely tend to be in the clear about what *candidates* there are for means to a priori knowledge. What they doubt, given their fundamental worry that there could be no genuinely non-experiential ways of acquiring factual knowledge, is that these candidates really create knowledge, or that they really create factual knowledge, or that the knowledge they create is really a priori (cf. 195). In other words, what motivates HPapk are once again obstacles to well-known candidate means – obstacles like Cohen's KR (cf. 201) – that are to be removed on level 2, rather than a felt lack of means. Note also that Cassam for once acknowledges (cf. 192) that the obstacles here – even when formulated summarily as what I've called the 'fundamental worry' of askers of HPapk – are hardly intuitive. Cassam therefore sees himself forced to try and give this fundamental worry 'intuitive backing', but I don't think he succeeds.

On level 3, on the other hand, HPapk parallels the case of HPsap: the enabling conditions Cassam discusses (cf. 215f.) *do* concern the means (presupposed rather than) proposed on level 1, as his general schema requires.

Regarding HPom, a natural treatment along modified Cassamian lines could be expected to go something like this: first, I would tend to claim (though I'm less confident here than with HPew and HPpk) that HPom is again motivated by qualms about various obvious candidate means (perception, inference, testimony, etc.) rather than by a felt absence of means. One would thus have to try to remove the obstacles to at least one of these means on level 2 (and if this step involved the use of tools which themselves are subject to obstacles, these second-order obstacles would have to be removed on level 2′). On level 3, one could then go on to discuss enabling conditions for those level 1 means the obstacles to which were successfully removed on levels 2 and 2′.

What then does Cassam do? He first proposes perception as the means of choice on level 1 (cf. 158). Now, since perceptual knowledge of other minds is perceptual knowledge, that would actually require him to deal, on level 2, with Stroud's U once again. On the (counterfactual) assumption that Stroud's U could be removed with the help of Dretske's notion of epistemic perception, Cassam would then have to go on to remove, on level 2′, the second-order obstacles that are specific to epistemic perception as a means to knowledge of other minds.

Cassam, however, skips this initial step and just takes epistemic perception directly as the level 1 means to knowledge of other minds. Consequently, on level 2 (rather than 2′), he removes a range of obstacles to epistemic perception as a means to such knowledge. That's ok as far as it goes, but also here Cassam gives us reason to raise our eyebrows when he realises that his way of dealing with these obstacles 'blur[s] the dividing line between the obstacle-overcoming and obstacle-dissipating responses'; which, to be sure, he thinks is 'not necessarily a bad thing' (164). Well, it may not be a bad thing for the specific response at hand, but it certainly is for the general schema.

Finally, Cassam discusses two enabling conditions for epistemic perception as a means to knowledge of other minds, the 'Identity Condition' and the 'Spatiality Condition' (171). On p. 172, Cassam realises that the Identity Condition, like the enabling conditions in the HPsap example, once again raises the question whether explaining how enabling conditions are fulfilled does not really amount to removing obstacles, i. e. whether the distinction between levels 2 and 3 can be upheld. Cassam this time devotes an entire section (5.4) to the issue, arguing (just like in the case of HPsap) that there is a difference in intuitiveness between regular obstacles and those arising from enabling conditions; however, here as there, I can discern no such difference. In any event, while Cassam goes out of his way to save the distinction, he ends up saying that 'there is no need to go to the stake for the sake of maintaining a sharp distinction between Levels 2 and 3' (186). That is a bit of a blow to the charitable reader who up to here has tried hard to make sense of the distinction, and of Cassam's general schema as a whole.

We see then that Cassam's general structural schema of EHPQs starts to wobble badly even when applied – with care – to his own example cases. Now, Cassam can be expected to meet such criticism simply by toning down the strength of his claims.

We've seen that he already does so at various places in his book, and he has further done so in personal discussion. The question is what is ultimately left if his 'talk of the different "levels" of a multi-levels response shouldn't be taken too literally' (vi). If the remaining claim is just that 'a satisfactory response to [an epistemological] how-possible question has to do several different and interconnected things in the course of a single evolving enquiry' (ibid.), then not much.

In my view, then, Cassam's framework fails to capture the general structure of EHPQs – if indeed any such general structure, or any such structure of interest, there is. However, even if Cassam's schema were to fit the EHPQs he discusses in his book, I believe that it still could not fully replace transcendental arguments as an approach to EHPQs, as he argues in chapter 2. The reason is that there is (at least) one distinct variety of EHPQs which calls for treatment by the transcendental argument approach. I elaborate this point in the next section.

2.   Epistemological   how-possible   questions   and   transcendental arguments

I shall call the kind of EHPQs we dealt with so far 'type 1 EHPQs'. With this type, there is a clear implication that the asker of 'How is x possible?' has doubts, or would at least allow for the possibility of doubt, about the existence of x. An answer is expected to address such doubts, and the point of the answer lies primarily in putting such doubt to rest by telling us how x is possible (or, as the case may be, in confirming the doubt by showing that x is indeed impossible).

The case is different with 'type 2 EHPQs'. These come in the same surface form of 'How is x possible?', but can actually be paraphrased as 'What makes x possible?'. With this type of EHPQ, the asker of 'How is x possible?' has no doubts about the existence of x (as can be seen from the non-epistemological example 'How is *that* possible?', asked upon seeing a fakir lie down on his bed of nails). The point of an answer is not to allay any doubt about the existence of x (though it will inevitably contribute to doing so too). Rather, the existence of x is taken for granted, and the point of an answer lies in showing that something y is a precondition for the possibility of x.

Thus, whereas an answer to a type 1 EHPQ is intended to establish the possibility (or the impossibility) of x, an answer to a type 2 EHPQ is intended to

establish y by showing that it is a precondition for the possibility of x. Now, such an answer to a type 2 EHPQ, I take it, amounts exactly to what goes under the name of a 'regressive transcendental argument': the 'proof' (Ameriks) of something y by showing that it is a precondition for something x that is taken for granted (cf. Cassam: 57; Ameriks 2003: 51).

Cassam (58) admits that Kant uses regressive transcendental arguments, but says that he doesn't use them to answer the EHPQ 'How is empirical knowledge possible?'. My claim would be that Kant *does* pose and answer this EHPQ, or at least variants of it such as 'How is perceptual knowledge possible?' or 'How is perceptual knowledge of objects possible?'. But he asks these questions not in the type 1 sense – which seems to be the only sense Cassam recognises for EHPQs – but in the type 2 sense. Kant asks questions like: 'How is perceptual knowledge of objects possible?' and gives answers like: 'It is possible *thanks to categorial thinking*!', thereby 'proving' that thinking is categorial by showing that this is a precondition of the (according to him, obvious) possibility of perceptual knowledge of objects.

How is talk of 'proof' and 'proving' to be understood in this context? Are Kantian 'preconditions' supposed to be *necessary* conditions? I conclude my comment with a number of remarks on this issue.

First, note that a regressive transcendental argument in support of y would appear to have force even if there could in principle be an infinity of other explanations y′, y″, etc. for the possibility of x, as long as none of them is a lot more straightforward than y from the start. Kantian preconditions might thus not be necessary in the strictly logical sense, but in the sense that we epistemologists *cannot but* assume that y must be the case, given that no alternative explanations are in sight, let alone any more plausible ones.

Nevertheless, the general consensus – in which Cassam shares – seems to be that Kant *did* regard his preconditions to be necessary conditions in the strong sense, and it is not for me to make a case to the contrary here. What I dare claim, however, is that Kant would have wanted his preconditions to be understood as being necessary in the sense of necessary for the empirical knowledge *that we in fact have*, and not for some artificial minimalist conception of empirical knowledge. Kant's proposal, for instance, that spatial perception is a necessary condition for the possibility of perceptual

knowledge of objects (cf. 88) could thus not be refuted by pointing out that, say, in a Strawsonian purely auditory world, perceptual knowledge would be possible without spatial perception – as Cassam tries to do in his ch. 3.

Indeed, Cassam's central objection against the transcendental argument approach to EHPQs is just that it tries to answer them by identifying necessary conditions (cf. e. g. vii, 52f., 58). This cannot be right, Cassam says, because an essential element in an explanation of the possibility of some type of knowledge is the specification of (one or several) means of acquiring such knowledge, and such means are never unique, but always only practical. But apart from the fact that these latter claims are doubtful even in connection with type 1 EHPQs like HPew and, especially, HPpk (cf. section 1), it should be clear that Cassam's objection is surely wrong with regard to EHPQs of type 2: if 'How is empirical knowledge possible?' is taken in the type 2 sense, then the identification of preconditions for the possibility of empirical knowledge – be they necessary or not – *is* the proper response, and it is the Cassamian multi-levels response that would be amiss. It *may* be that something like a multi-levels approach à la Cassam does make for a proper response to type 1 EHPQs; but pending a more elaborate version of such an approach than the one Cassam offers us in his book, that point remains to be established.

David Lüthi

Zürich University

luethi@philos.uzh.ch

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WHAT IS KANT'S REFUTATION OF IDEALISM DESIGNED TO REFUTE?

Bernhard Ritter

The passage that Kant added to the Postulates of Empirical Thinking in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* can be approached by way of two of his designations. The first appears in a lengthy footnote to the preface and reads "a strict proof … of the objective reality of outer intuition," or, more explicitly, "[a proof of] the existence of things outside us."[36] The second is the actual heading of the passage: "The Refutation of Idealism." Each instance can be taken, however heuristically, to correspond to a distinct task of clarifying the import of the argument.

The passage heading suggests that it is a matter of getting clear about the idealist's position, and how the argument is intended to disprove it. This may be termed the *negative import* of the Refutation of Idealism, as it consists of understanding what it refutes and how.

According to the footnote in the preface, the passage is a proof of "the existence of things outside us". This phrase seems unequivocal, although, it will be argued that there is no proof from Kant that establishes a *categorical* existential proposition ranging over things outside us. Because Kant's label is misleading, spelling out the conclusion may be useful. In any case, doing this and reconstructing how it is achieved is part of the *positive import* of the argument. Moreover, an account of the positive import should include an explanation of why external objects are required.

1. Cassam on Kant

Yet, there is a further question about the precedent step that leads to the cognition of external objects. It is not concerned with the Refutation of Idealism alone but with transcendental arguments in general: do they explain how empirical knowledge is possible? Cassim Cassam answers in the negative.[37] To see how he supports his claim it

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[36] B XL.
[37] Cassam 2007 [= *The Possibility of Knowledge*]: vi, and section 2.

will serve to consider his outline of the Refutation as an instance of a transcendental argument, and how he comments it:

> Inner experience is a form of self-knowledge; it is knowledge of the temporal order of one's experiences. Outer experience is perceptual knowledge of the existence of objects in space. Kant's claim is that outer experience is a necessary condition for inner experience. So if the sceptic grants that he has inner experience, then he must also grant he has perceptual knowledge of external objects. (Cassam 2007: 54)

Identifying the sceptic with the idealist for a moment, the quotation gives a rough idea of how the Refutation-argument works. One premise links (the possibility of) self-awareness to the necessary condition that the subject be aware of external objects. Now, when the idealist denies direct awareness of external objects, he either suffers a *modus tollens* of self-awareness, which he thought independent of outer experience, or he must admit that he is aware of external objects. Obviously, this reasoning relies on demonstrating that the necessary condition really holds. Cassam comments:

> If this argument is successful, what it shows is that perceptual knowledge is *necessary* for inner experience but showing that perceptual knowledge is necessary for inner experience is not the same thing as explaining how perceptual knowledge itself is *possible* [.] (Cassam 2007: 55)

Cassam identifies a mismatch between Kant's how-possible questions and transcendental arguments that establish necessary conditions by way of answers. He suggests that transcendental arguments exceed the level of generality appropriate to yield an answer. Associated with, but not in direct support of this objection, Cassam argues that transcendental arguments are neither necessary nor sufficient to answer in particular the question of how *perceptual* knowledge is possible.[38]

Cassam's arguments in support of this latter claim will be considered in a moment. In reaction to the charge of excessive generality, I would like to suggest that it is due to asking too much of too brief a passage of the *Critique*. Taking even the transcendental deduction as a whole, why should it—considered in isolation—be the decisive unit for assessing Kant's explanation for how perceptual knowledge is possible? Consider the following remark, which occurs at the very end of the transcendental deduction (in §27):

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[38] Cassam 2007: 52.

[T]he categories contain the grounds of the possibility of all experience in general from the side of the understanding. But more about how they make experience possible, and which principles (*Grundsätze*) of its possibility they yield in their application to appearances, will be taught in the following chapter (*Hauptstück*) on the transcendental use of the power of judgment. (B 167)

Kant's reference to the "following chapter" is inexact. What comes after is the Analytic's second *book*, whose first chapter contains no statement of principles (*Grundsätze*). The chapter is exclusively concerned with what Kant calls the "schematism" of the categories. A schema is an aspect of our understanding of concepts. It is not a representation but a method of the imagination to engender a representation that is in accordance with the concept. The schema of e.g. "substance" gives rise to the representation of a permanent quantity of a something in time, "which … endures while everything else changes."[39]

The principles are only touched upon in the second chapter, by the application of the categories to appearances in general in accordance with their schematism. Thus I identify the "principles of [the] possibility [of experience]" in the quoted passage with the principles of pure understanding, among which the crucial explanatory work is done through the analogies of experience. Since Kant does not deem the possibility of perceptual knowledge to be conclusively established *after* the transcendental deduction (as the quoted passage indicates[40]), and seems to presuppose it in the Refutation, an assessment of his answer to the question of the possibility of perceptual knowledge needs to take into account the interrelation between the two and the principles of pure understanding. Within the constraints of this paper it will only be possible to say something about the analogies of experience (section V).

How does Cassam support his claim that transcendental arguments are not *necessary* for explaining the possibility of perceptual knowledge? Cassam argues that the specification of 'means of coming to know', and the removing of obstacles for these as sources of knowledge is a perfectly good answer for epistemological how-possible questions.[41] For example, to know that the tub is dipped is to possess a piece of empirical knowledge. We explain how empirical knowledge is possible by specifying

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[39] B 179f.; B 183/A 143f.

[40] For Kant "experience" is "empirical cognition" (*empirische Erkenntnis*), cf. B 147. There is more on Kant's notion of experience in section V.

[41] Cassam 2007: 8.

empirical means of knowledge-acquisition. Since seeing that the tub is dipped is a means of coming to know that the tub is dipped, we have explained how knowing that the tub is dipped is possible by pointing out that seeing is an appropriate means for acquiring this piece of knowledge. This is a *means-response*, and Cassam believes that it is "in no obvious sense incomplete".[42] As a result, it is not necessary to go into transcendental reasoning to explain how perceptual knowledge is possible. Cassam recommends an approach he terms a *multi-levels response*. It consists of adding specifications of obstacle-removal to the means-response, as well as background conditions necessary for the means to be a source of knowledge.[43] To avoid the instrumentalistic implications of "means of knowing" Cassam newly prefers the term "ways of knowing".[44]

I see a difficulty in maintaining that a means-response is "in no obvious sense incomplete" and that how-possible questions are *obstacle-dependent*.[45] A how-possible question is related to the statement claiming that the state of affairs holds which the how-possible question questions. Let's call it statement *s*. That the question is obstacle-dependent means that it arises out of a conflict between *s* and a set of statements held true. The way in which *s* is precarious is determined by its relation to that set of statements. Consequently, for a means-response (with or without indications for obstacle-removal) to be "in no obvious sense incomplete" presupposes an obstacle. *Given* that the obstacle is 'worries about appropriate means of knowing', a means-response is in no obvious sense incomplete. But let *s* be "there is mathematical knowledge" and the set of statements the following:

1. mathematical knowledge is synthetic *a priori*
2. experience yields synthetic but not *a priori* judgments
3. analysis of concepts yields *a priori* but not synthetic judgments
4. intuition cannot precede the intuited object

Given the above, merely identifying pure intuition as a means for acquiring synthetic *a priori* knowledge is certainly an incomplete answer. It amounts to the bold assertion that it is possible by a "kind of experience before experience". But *that* cannot be clear from

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[42] This phrase occurs repeatedly (cf. Cassam 2007: 48, 127, 218).

[43] Cassam 2007: 8f., 35, 51, 63 – 65.

[44] Lecture on the "Possibility of Self-Knowledge" at the University of Konstanz on 26th June 2008.

[45] Cf. Cassam 2007: 2.

intuition; or at least Kant would maintain that asking a philosophical question about the possibility of mathematical knowledge is not asking how mathematical calculations themselves work; instead, it means asking for a valid explanation of their objectivity. If, in addition, it is correct that in philosophy one proceeds *a priori* by means of concepts and not by intuitions,[46] only an *argument* could possibly yield an answer.

Thus, the more abstract propositions that you add to the list and the more intricate the obstacle, the more likely a means-response will look incomplete. That the example above was based on mathematics and not perceptual knowledge[47] should not matter, since what is to count as a complete answer is dependent on the obstacle, and thus, on the set of statements (perceptual or not) that are held true.

Still, *given* that the obstacle is 'worries about appropriate means', the Kantian approach is not necessary, and this is what Cassam claimed. However, it is doubtful whether Cassam actually wanted to claim this, because it would be arbitrary to assume that if Kant were asked e.g. how it was possible to know from the number of guests how many times they will clink glasses, he would add a transcendental deduction to his answer, or would think of it as incomplete if he did not. It is open to him to admit that there are other obstacles besides philosophical problems.

But if both the obstacle and the alternative answer, such as the multi-levels response, are philosophical, then the matter is not so straightforward. It will be argued later in this paper that toning down the instrumentalistic implications and talking more generally of "ways of knowing" deprives Cassam of the conceptual means for giving reasons for why the Kantian approach should not be a kind of a multi-levels response, since the difference depends on being means-specific or not. Certainly, this does not preclude that transcendental arguments may not be necessary for answering epistemological how-possible questions. But, if they are not, still they could be relevant for answering them.

How does Cassam support his claim that transcendental arguments are not *sufficient* to answer the question "how is perceptual knowledge possible?" (HP_{pk})? In Cassam's interpretation, the Kantian approach accounts for the possibility of synthetic *a*

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[46] According to Kant, this is what distinguishes mathematical from philosophical cognition (cf. A 723f. /B 751f.).

[47] In response to Cassam 2007: 56.

priori knowledge, whereas the possibility of *a posteriori* knowledge is not one of its central concerns:

> Kant is an example of a philosopher who appears to think that (HP_{pk}) lacks *any* respectable motivation. In his terms, perceptual knowledge would be synthetic a posteriori knowledge, but 'the possibility of synthetic *a posteriori* judgments, of those which are gathered from experience … requires no special explanation; for experience is nothing but a continual joining together (synthesis) of perceptions' ([*Prol.*] 275) If the possibility of synthetic a posteriori knowledge requires no special explanation, then (HP_{pk}) simply doesn't arise; there is no obstacle for it to trade on. (Cassam 2007: 22)

In another instance where Cassam tries to justify this contention with reference to the quoted passage from Kant's *Prolegomena*, he adds that in Kant's introduction to the *Critique*, the possibility of experience is not included in the list of how-possible questions.[48]

However, Cassam qualifies his claim in order to account for the anti-sceptical orientation of the Refutation-argument. Since perceptual cognition of external objects is exactly what is questioned by the sceptic (whom we provisionally identified with the idealist), it is obvious that Kant cannot assume perceptual knowledge of an external world, if his goal is to refute scepticism. According to Cassam, the Refutation-argument is, in this respect, "a special case" in not merely positing actual empirical knowledge of external objects and moving to its preconditions, but also giving an argument in support of the claim that we experience external objects.[49] Cassam rightly remarks that to establish the empirical knowledge of external objects as a necessary condition for inner experience is not an explanation of the possibility of the latter.

To summarize, transcendental arguments, when dealing with the possibility of perceptual knowledge of external objects, either (a) assume it to be something actual or (b) prove it to be a necessary condition for experience in general; in neither case is an explanation for the possibility of perceptual knowledge itself achieved.

It can be agreed that (b) is an appropriate expression of the goal of the Refutation-argument. But no general conclusion that transcendental arguments are irrelevant for answering the question of how perceptual knowledge of external objects is possible, can be drawn. It has already been suggested that this is largely the design of the schematism and the principles of pure understanding. So the claim is that there is an

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[48] Cassam 2007: 58; B 19 – 24.
[49] Cassam 2007: 56f.

answer but not where Cassam is searching. There will be more on this matter in section V when touching on the analogies of experience.

Cassam refers to (a) as the interpretation of transcendental arguments as "regressive arguments".[50] The somewhat excessive claim that the possibility of experience is not one of Kant's central concerns means taking a further step, since (a) only presupposes that perceptual knowledge is possible; transcendental arguments could still address the question of *how* that is possible. But, according to Cassam, regressive transcendental arguments are not used by Kant to that end, particularly since, in the *Prolegomena,* he finds that "the possibility of synthetic *a posteriori* judgements … requires no special explanation".[51]

Granted, it is true that the *Prolegomena* are not concerned with the possibility of *a posteriori* judgments; still it could be a concern for the *Critique*, since the former proceed following the analytic or regressive method whereas the latter is laid out synthetically or progressively. The analytic method "proceeds from that which is sought as if it were given, and ascends to the conditions under which alone it is possible";[52] but "the work itself [i.e. the *Critique*] absolutely had to be composed according to the *synthetic method*".[53] Kant explicitly states that the *Critique* "takes no foundations as given except reason itself, and … therefore tries to develop cognition out of its original seeds without relying on any fact whatever".[54] This rules out an essential dependence on the assumption of actual empirical knowledge, irrespective of whether Kant's "regressive method" and Cassam's "regressive arguments" are the same or not.[55] (One should note that there certainly are individual arguments and passages developed regressively in the *Critique*.)

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[50] Cassam 2007: 51 – 62 (section 2.1). The notion of "regressive arguments" is introduced in Cassam 2007: 57 with reference to Ameriks 2003: 51, 55; cf. fn. 20, below.

[51] *Prol.* 275.

[52] *Prol.* 276.

[53] *Prol.* 263.

[54] *Prol.* 274.

[55] In fact these notions are different. According to Karl Ameriks, a "regressive argument would show that *y* is a necessary condition of knowledge *x*"; he adds that "it is not a radical argument from a premise not assuming the possession of knowledge" (Ameriks 2003: 60f.). If this is all a regressive argument is supposed to be, one could readily agree that at least some of Kant's transcendental arguments are regressive. But thus defined, they could still be deductive arguments. The inference from "I know *x*, only if I know *z*" and "I know *z*, only if I know *y*" to "I know *x*, only if I know *y*" establishes deductively that my knowledge of *y* is a necessary condition of my knowledge of *x*, yet it is "regressive" in the sense explained above.

It may seem surprising that Kant omits the question "how is experience possible?" in the introduction to the *Critique*, especially when, in his posthumously published *What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany?,* he calls it "the supreme problem of transcendental philosophy".[56] But taking into account the heading of the introductory passage in question, section VI "The General Problem (*Aufgabe*) of pure reason", a possible explanation emerges. The possibility of experience may not be a problem *of pure reason*, but be a problem—even the major problem—of transcendental philosophy. This is the case, if the solution of the problem of pure reason requires the solution of the problem of the possibility of experience. Here, it is not necessary to pursue the matter further. The passage quoted above from the end of the Deduction-passage already substantiates at least the *relevance* of the latter problem to the project of the *Critique*.[57]

This section has dealt with some objections against the indispensability of transcendental reasoning to answer the question how empirical knowledge is possible. It was largely an attempt to show that these objections, at least in their present form, are not conclusive. The following section deals more extensively with the Refutation of Idealism as a transcendental argument.

2.   The structure of the argument

What is a transcendental argument? Kant gives three rules for permissible transcendental reasoning. First, a transcendental argument or proof does not show "that the given concept (e.g., of that which happens) leads directly to another concept (that of cause) …; rather it shows that the experience itself, hence the object of experience, would be impossible without such a connection."[58] Kant's example in brackets evokes the Second Analogy of Experience: "All alterations occur in accordance with the law of

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[56] Ak. XX: 275.

[57] The quotation is from B 168; for further evidence see the lengthy footnote in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (Ak. IV: 474 – 476).

[58] A 783/B 811. The omitted comment preceding the semicolon gives the reason for the *non licet* stated by Kant: "for [the feasibility of] such a transition [from one concept to the other] nothing could be held responsible." This thought will be taken up by the explicit statement of the first rule a few pages further (A 786/B 814), though only in order to address the (illegitimate) "transcendental proofs" of the transcendental dialectic. Consequently the explicit formulation of the rule is negative and less instructive than the one quoted above.

… cause and effect." (B 232)[59] The connection between "alteration" and "causality" in this conclusion is derived by means of a principle that declares it to be necessary for the experiencing of an object. This is the first distinctive mark of transcendental arguments. The second and third rule states "that for each transcendental proposition only **a single** proof can be found," and "that [transcendental proofs] must never be **apagogic** but always **ostensive**."[60] An "apagogic" proof is a proof "by refutation of the opposite". It starts with searching out propositions that are known to be wrong (owing to inconsistency or other reasons), but implied by the negation of the desired conclusion. A *modus tollens* refutes the antecedent proposition and yields—"by refutation of the opposite"—the desired result. In contrast, an ostensive proof establishes its result directly, ideally by affirmative premises.[61]

The Refutation of Idealism meets the first criterion, which will become apparent from the presentation of the argument below. In Kant's view it certainly meets the second criterion too, for he claims it to be "the only possible [proof]" of things outside us.[62] But if the Refutation-argument meets the third criterion is not clear. Its underlying argument-structure allows for two negative premises, of which only one is actually stated. Kant presents the idealist as somebody who drops the premise that the perception of external objects is mediate and insecure, while self-awareness as a substance in time remains unaffected. Since the latter (that we possess self-knowledge) materially implies the former (that we sometimes perceive external objects), the idealist encounters a refutation of self-awareness. Dropping the denial that we perceive external objects, it follows that the perception of external objects is a necessary condition for self-awareness. Hence the Refutation-argument is an ostensive proof, but its force is in part due to an apagogic proof held in position. Therefore, it may not be altogether clear if the Refutation of Idealism is a transcendental argument, not because it falls in between categories, but because it is too many things at once.

The argument, then, can be paraphrased in a first attempt as follows:

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[59] This formulation of the second analogy gives the impression that Kant attempted to derive metaphysical claims from epistemological conditions; instead, it should actually be stated as a *regulative* principle (as an instruction on how to proceed) and as an *analogy* (*x* is related to a given alteration as cause to effect).

[60] A 787/B 815; A 789/B 817. The Guyer-Wood translation prefers to set Kant's spacing in bold type.

[61] Ak. XX: 288; cf. Ak. IX: 52.

[62] B XLI.

(P₁) to cognize my existence (*Dasein*) as a substance determined in time is possible, necessarily **only if** there is something permanent (*etwas Beharrliches*) in inner intuition (*Anschauung*) **or** outer perception (*Wahrnehmung*),

(P₂) **it is false** that there is something permanent in inner intuition;

(C₁) **hence** to cognize my existence as a substance determined in time is possible, necessarily **only if** there is something permanent in outer perception.

(C₁') To cognize my existence as a substance determined in time is possible, necessarily **only if** there are actual things in my outer perception.

Formally, in order to obtain conclusion (C₁) the antecedent of (P₁) has to be introduced as an assumption. A *modus ponens* yields the disjunction "there is something permanent in inner intuition or outer perception". According to (P₂), the first component proposition is false; hence the second must be true. Here the argument relies on two general claims of the *Critique*: first, the exhaustive disjunction of inner and outer intuition—there is only spatial and temporal sensitivity; second, since only concepts *and* intuition can engender knowledge, a kind of intuition is required, if consciousness of oneself is to be knowledge.[63] Since the statement "there is something permanent in outer perception" is derived on the basis of the assumption that "to cognize my existence as a substance determined in time is possible", the latter has to be written as a sufficient condition of the former, which equals (C₁). The specification "as a substance" only appears in the second note to the proof.[64] Its interpretative addition to the paraphrase above will be justified in a moment. As represented in (C₁'), Kant substitutes "actual things" for "something [permanent] in perception".[65] This should not be seen as an additional step but only as a gloss on conclusion (C₁).

As already touched upon in Cassam's outline above, the aim of the argument is not to prove that outer sense really represents external objects, "for outer sense is already in itself a relation of intuition to something actual outside me"; instead, the aim is to establish that both are "inseparably bound up".[66] This inseparability is due to the

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[63] The second presupposition is made explicit in Kant's second note to the proof (B 277f.).

[64] B 277f.

[65] B 276f. I prefer "permanent" to "persistent" as a translation of *beharrlich*. What Kant is looking for is not this or that object, which is actually persistent when viewed against a permanent backdrop, but the backdrop itself, i.e., the totality of physical substances.

[66] B XL.

necessity of something permanent in order to cognize (to think *and* intuit) oneself as a *res* or substance. In support of (P₂), Kant writes "all grounds of determination that can be encountered in me are representations, and as such require something persistent that is distinct even from them, in relation to which their change … can be determined".[67] In the temporal succession of mere representations, no content determines the following content strictly; hence there is no unity to account for the subject as a substance.

It has been remarked that the Refutation is not presented as an apagogic proof in the text. This could have been done easily by adding the idealist's denial of immediate perception of permanent things in outer perception as a second negative premise. In that form, the Refutation-argument would have been

> a hypothetical inference, whose *consequens* is a disjunctive judgment. The hypothetical proposition whose *consequens* is disjunctive is the major proposition; the minor proposition affirms that the *consequens* (*per omnia membra*) is false, and the conclusion affirms that the *antecedens* is false. (Ak. IX: 130)

The quotation is from paragraph 79 ("Dilemma") of the *Jäsche Logic*. In the note adjoined the paragraph Kant finds "something deceptive" in dilemmata, for "not to refute propositions directly but rather only to show difficulties [and to infer from difficulties to falsity] is feasible in many, indeed, most things".[68] It may have been for this reason that Kant presented his argument as a *direct refutation*, based on formerly established premises.

The closing passage in the proof starts with the first complete sentence after the page brake B 275 to 276. The component after the "i[d] e[st]" is definitely a gloss on the conclusion, but the rest is difficult to assess.

> Now consciousness in time is necessarily combined with the consciousness of the possibility of this time-determination: Therefore it is also necessarily combined with the existence of things outside me, as the condition of time-determination; i.e., the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me. (B 276)

Taking a hint from the theorem,[69] the consciousness in question is "empirical", but not in the sense of including cognition of corporeal objects, otherwise the argument would presuppose what it is about to establish. In Kant's terminology, "empirical

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[67] B XXXIX/B 275.

[68] Ak. IX: 131. Note that the term "dilemma" is not used in its ordinary sense by Kant.

[69] It starts with: "The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence…" (B 275)

consciousness" of oneself is empirical in that it is not only conceptual or rational but relies on inner sense, that is, it contains empirical representations through which the subject temporally determines itself.[70] Considered in itself, the *ego* of empirical consciousness is purely formal; it is precisely and exclusively that which ascribes (intuitive) representations to itself. It is a structural feature of all representation in empirical consciousness: *ego cogito cogitatum*.

The problem of interpreting the quoted passage lies in that to be conscious of something usually does not include the consciousness of whatever makes it possible. Moreover, the transition from consciousness in time to "things outside me" appears rather abrupt. This is where the conjecture from above becomes relevant that temporal consciousness has to be specified as "consciousness as a substance in time". The empirical consciousness of oneself is necessarily related to a substance, since this is in what it must inhere. In order to *cognize* itself as a substance in time the subject has to view its intuitive representations as caused by spatio-temporal substances, of which its representations systematically depend. Consequently, the subject has to view itself as a spatio-temporal substance too, that is, as a body.

That this thought, derived from the analogies of experience, is pertinent to the Refutation-argument is supported by a passage in Kant's General Note on the System of the Principles.[71] The quoted passage, then, can be reconstructed as a piece of hypothetical reasoning. Here, conclusion (C$_1$') reappears as premise (P):

(P$_3$) my actual empirical consciousness is necessarily an actual cognition of my existence in time as a substance, necessarily **only if** it is possible for me to cognize my existence as a substance determined in time,

(P) for me to cognize my existence as a substance determined in time is possible, necessarily **only if** there are actual things in my outer perception;

(C$_2$) **hence** my actual empirical consciousness is necessarily an actual cognition of my existence in time as a substance, necessarily **only if** there are actual things in my outer perception.

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[70] On the notion of "empirical consciousness" cf. B XL, 207f., 217f.; Ak. XVIII: 617; Guyer 1983: 343 – 345; Allison 2004: 276 – 279, 289 – 291.
[71] B 291f.

Following Kant, the adverb "necessarily" in the antecedent of (P₃) ought to be considered as governing the relationship between the predicate term "actual cognition of my existence in time as a substance" and the subject term "actual empirical consciousness",[72] and the second instance of "necessarily" as governing the conditional. What accounts for the necessity in the first premise (in the view I ascribe to Kant) is the relational category of accident and substance; in the second premise it is the relational category of causality.[73]

However, on this reading Kant's reasoning may appear needlessly complicated, since the expression of possibility occurring through out the reasoning is not present in the conclusion (C₂). A simpler proof can be given by writing premise (P₁) with the antecedent of (P₃), and dropping the adverb "possible".[74] If this reconstruction is judged superior, the passage quoted above ought to be seen as a *clarification* and not as an additional step in the argument.

For the concern of this paper it is not required to decide which reading is to be preferred. The important point is that Kant regards the necessary connection of antecedent and consequent as involving epistemic immediacy. This is clear from Kant's gloss on the final conclusion:[75]

> Therefore [consciousness in time] is also necessarily combined with existence of the things outside me, as the condition of time-determination; i.e. the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me. (B 276)

The same thought is expressed in the preface of the *Critique*.[76] This certainly supports the argument that Kant's strategy is not to demonstrate that consciousness of external things is not mediate because it leads to inconsistency, but that it is necessarily, hence, immediately, combined with inner experience, and *therefore* not mediate. His argument is a direct refutation of the "powerful objection against [the] rules for proving [the]

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[72] Cf. "[T]he absolute necessity of the judgement is only a conditioned necessity of the thing, or of the predicate in the judgement." (A 593f./B 621f.)

[73] On the necessity of the relational categories cf. B 201, fn.

[74] Dominique Kuenzle pointed this out to me.

[75] It would be beside the point to criticise that the conclusion does not mention the necessary relationship between empirical consciousness and consciousness as a substance in time. Kant's notion of "empirical consciousness" is a reconstruction of the Cartesian consciousness. The reading presented here is precisely a clarification of the relationship between the conclusion quoted above and what it is intended to refute.

[76] "[T]he reality of outer sense is necessarily bound up with that of inner sense, i.e., I am just as certainly conscious that there are things outside me to which my sensibility relates, as I am conscious that I myself exist determined in time." (B XLI, fn.)

existence [of things] mediately … made by **idealism**."[77] These principles, referred to as "rules for proving existence mediately", may include the analogies of experience. If so, the passage contains information regarding the way the Refutation-argument goes beyond the analogies. But the following argumentation only relies on the contrast between "inferential" and "immediate".

The doubts of the idealist about "proving existence mediately" can be related to the objection against "inferring outer things" in the first note to the proof: "Idealism assumes that the only immediate experience is inner experience, and that from that outer things could only be **inferred**, but, as in any case in which one infers from given effects to **determinate** causes, only unreliably." (B 276) Consequently, one could not understand the Refutation's purpose if its object was to prove that empirical self-consciousness proves the existence of external things, since this is precisely what the quoted objection challenges. Instead, it has to establish that their connection is non-inferentially immediate. If this is correct, Kant's formulation of the theorem of the Refutation of Idealism is inappropriate: "The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me." (B 275) This proposition is neither what is nor what ought to be established.

Instead, the proper reply to the idealist is the following. In order to comprehend the entire flow of actual representations and recollections as *my* experience of something, I need to cognize these representations as determinations of my existence as something permanent. Obviously, the idealist cannot *infer* from his intuitive representations a permanent thing as possessor of these representations, for he could not infer external objects from inner experience, if he was himself an inferred external object. The subject as a substance has to be brought into the reach of intuitive cognition, and, consequently, to be located in time. But to locate oneself as a substance with ones representations as accidental modifications in time one needs to view these modifications as systematically dependent from other substances. Hence, it is not that one has inner experience and can conclude on this basis that there are outer objects, but that in order to comprehend ones intuitive representations as experience in the first place one has to view them as causally dependent from external substances.

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[77] B 274f. In contrast, Henry Allison, in his seminal work *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, views the Refutation expressly as a *reductio* (cf. Allison 2004: 288f.)

However, this reasoning only yields a conditional for a conclusion. It does not amount to a proof of the external world. So, why don't we add the categorical premise that we have inner experience and reason to the conclusion that there are actual things in our outer perception? That this would be inappropriate can perhaps be best supported by reading again how Kant rephrases his result: "[T]he consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of other things outside me." (B 276) The conclusion expresses a conceptual dependency of "inner experience" and "external world". What the Refutation of Idealism establishes then, is that there is no purely inner experience. If this is correct, there is no independent basis for a proof of the external world either.

This result should not be viewed as a disappointment. It's just that Kant's strategy of obstacle-removal does not overcome the veil of ideas but rather dissipates it; he deprives the idealist of the requisite conceptual means for developing his "powerful objection".[78] In the third note to the proof, Kant underlines that its conclusion does not make all intuitive representations of external objects true; it merely draws a boundary for self-knowledge in the face of massive error: inner experience cannot be entirely veridical when outer experience is entirely illusory.[79]

3.   What the Refutation-argument is designed to refute

Giving an account of the positive import of the argument involves elaborating its conclusion, how it is achieved and, more specifically, answering why external objects are required (for inner experience). This, I believe, has been accomplished in the last section. However, we have only seen *ad limine* how transcendental arguments explain the possibility of empirical knowledge. The experience-enabling function of the categories has to be set out in more detail, which will occur later in this paper.

An account of the negative import of the argument consists in explaining what it refutes and how. Since the idealist's position is disproved by means of a direct refutation, that is, by establishing that consciousness of external object is immediate, the

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[78] The contrast between obstacle-overcoming and obstacle-dissipating responses is Cassam's. The first involves accepting an obstacle and showing a way how to deal with it; the second consists in arguing that the obstacle is in some way spurious (Cassam 2007: 25, 30, 162).
[79] B 278f.; cf. Allison 2004: 297.

how-part has already been covered. So what is still at issue is to expound the idealist position more thoroughly.

It may seem somewhat late to ask what it is that the Refutation-argument is designed to refute. But a more detailed exposition of idealism will serve as further confirmation and clarification of what has been said about the aim of the argument. The Refutation of Idealism is often presented with an emphasis on an alleged direct relation between the perception of things outside us and the consciousness of the temporal order of representations in inner experience. According to the view supported here, it is the idealist's conception of the *subject* that raises the difficulty, which, as a consequence, undercuts the status of the series of representations and recollections as a whole. Put simply, if the subject is dubious, inner experience as somebody's experience will be dubious too. Besides, if Kant did not consider the subjective temporal order of representations as given, it would not only be insufficient ground for determining the subject itself in time; it would be no ground at all.[80]

Cassam remarks that the Refutation of Idealism won't have any force against a sceptic who is prepared to question inner experience, and that it does not eliminate the possibility that we are brains in a vat.[81] It is, I believe, important for the comprehension of the Refutation-argument to see that this is essentially correct. It has no force against one who is sceptical about inner experience, and, for that very reason, does not eliminate the possibility of a brains-in-a-vat scenario. However, as will be argued in this paper's conclusion, this does not leave us without means for finding out if we are brains in a vat or not. But Cassam's remark is also relevant for our present concern, since it clearly states for whom the Refutation-argument is *not* designed.

Before stating his theorem, Kant declares that it is directed against Descartes's "problematic idealism". Exploiting the first edition's fourth paralogism, problematic or empirical idealism can be characterized using four empirical propositions:

(EI₁)   our cognitive faculties are such that we cannot immediately perceive the existence of outer appearances but only infer it as causes of what is in us

(EI₂)   only the existence of what is in us can be immediately perceived

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[80] "[A]ll grounds of determination of my existence that can be encountered in me are representations, and as such require something [permanent] … in relation to which their change … can be determined." (B XXXIX/B 275)

[81] Cassam 2007 54f.; Cassam 2008 [= "Reply to Stroud"]: 533f.

(EI₃)   the existence of outer appearances is doubtful

(EI₄)   I exist as a thinking substance

If we add the principle to the list that whose existence must be inferred from its effects is doubtful, the proposition (EI₃), the uncertainty of the existence of outer appearances, can be justified as the conclusion of an argument. This is the argument that defines problematic idealism. Idealism is the doctrine of the doubtfulness or uncertainty of outer appearances.[82] It is this reasoning Kant referred to as a "powerful objection against [the] rules for proving existence mediately".[83] But to recognize the target of the Refutation-argument accurately, the fourth claim is decisive—"I exist as a thinking substance". The target is not Descartes' altogether sceptical First Meditation, but rather the *Second* Meditation after securing the existence of the subject as thinking substance. Here only are both of the claims, (EI₃) and (EI₄), which are required for the Refutation to start, achieved.[84]

According to Kant, idealism, the doctrine of the uncertainty of outer appearances, presupposes transcendental *realism*. Kant identifies this position with the claim that what *he* views as connections between certain concepts necessary for enabling experience are, according to transcendental realism, necessary connections in principles determining things in themselves.[85] In a less abstract way, transcendental realism claims that

(TR₁)   space and time, and therefore outer appearances, are things in themselves

(TR₂)   to cognize objects in themselves they need to be given as they are in themselves

Kant does not state (TR₂) explicitly, but I follow Allison in taking it to be an expression of the transcendental realist's tacit epistemological ideal against which human cognition can never measure up.[86] What connects both claims is the notion that for things to be cognized is purely accidental and, since what things are is given independent of all cognitive activities, full cognition is mere reproduction. Now, if certainty is to be attained, things in themselves have to be grasped on the model of ideas in our own

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[82] A 366 – 369; A 491/B 519; *Prol.* 293.
[83] B 274f.
[84] A.T. VII: 23 – 29.
[85] This description is extracted from A 297/B 353 and A 369.
[86] Allison 2004: 28.

mind, since every processing implies mediacy and uncertainty. A corresponding cognitive power would be intellectual, since it would need to grasp the inner properties of its object, yet at the same time non-discursive and immediate, like intuition.

It has been said that, according to Kant, problematic idealism "presupposes" transcendental realism. This notion has been adopted in order to not include a logical inference. For an inference to flow, human cognition has to be *contrasted* with the ideal of an intellectual intuition of things in themselves. Thus, the two transcendental claims do not logically imply problematic idealism because such an inference has to use a proposition about human cognition from the EI-list as a premise.

A word about transcendental *idealism* is unavoidable. Many interpreters understand Kant's thesis on the transcendental ideality of space as denying that things which we perceive as spatially extended really are extended.[87] While this is a conflation of the transcendental ideality of space with the empirical ideality or mind-dependency of space,[88] what is required is the attempt to understand how "the reality (i.e. objective validity) of space in regard to everything that can come before us externally as an object" is compatible with "its transcendental ideality … as soon as … we take it as something that grounds the things in themselves".[89] Admittedly, this is one of the most difficult problems in Kant's *Critique*, and there is no space to discuss it here.[90]

4.   The Cartesian *ego*

Kant views the thinking substance's lack of intuitive cognition as the only imperfection within problematic idealism.[91] Accordingly, if the purely conceptual "I think", which can accompany all representations, were to be combined with the subject's intellectual intuition, problematic idealism would be irrefutable. This underlines the importance of the presupposition of the Refutation-argument that any cognition requires concepts as well as intuitions.

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[87] "[Kant's] transcendental idealism commits him to denying that the objects which we perceive as spatio-temporal really are spatio-temporal." (Cassam 2007: 79)
[88] A 45f./B 62f., B 69 – 71.
[89] A 27f./B 43f.
[90] For a discussion cf. Prauss 1974: 12 – 61; Allison 2004: 50 – 73 (chap. 3).
[91] B XL.

But if the latter is legitimate with regards to Descartes is not clear. According to Descartes, it is not by imagination or perception that we grasp the nature of an object, but by means of the intellect.[92] This is relevant to the aim of the Second Meditation to establish the meditator as a substance and thinking as its internal determination, since at this stage in his reasoning, Descartes only allows necessary truths,[93] which cannot be captured by the senses.

However, Kant's presupposition is less demanding than it may appear. It only requires immediate consciousness of the thinking substance as determinable in the temporality of inner intuition. Since Descartes cannot *infer* the existence of the ego with thinking as its essential property, it is unavoidable that he claims immediate consciousness of oneself as a substance in time. Existence and essence of the self have to be cognized immediately, if the external world is to be repudiated as accessible only by inference. According to Kant, Descartes could only believe that this is feasible because he mistook a purely structural feature of consciousness for an essential property of a substance. In reality this substance is not to be met at all in the temporality of inner sense (for it is spatial). Here the introductory passage of the Paralogisms is pertinent:

> At the ground of [the pure doctrine of thinking beings] we can place nothing but the simple and in content for itself wholly empty representation **I**, … a mere consciousness that accompanies every concept. Through this I, or He, or It (the thing), which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts = *x*. … The proposition "I think" is … taken here [i.e. in the pure doctrine of thinking beings] only problematically … If more than the *cogito* were the ground of our pure rational cognition of thinking beings … [it] could [not] serve to teach apodictically about thinking beings in general something touching on their nature[.] (A 345 – 347/B 403 – 406)

It has to be kept in mind that only apodictic truths are allowed in the Second Meditation . This is why thinking has to be a universal and necessary feature of the *ego*. Now, the "I think", Kant says, can be taken either in its pure meaning, which is suited to accompany every representation of consciousness in general, or as claiming something about an empirical person. If it is taken in the former sense, it is apodictically true about a first-person perspective in general, but entirely empty. In the latter sense it has propositional content, it contains "I exist", but it cannot serve as a determination of

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consciousness in general. The "I think" in the former sense is empty precisely because it is so general, yet it is the only universal trait of all subjective content. Since it cannot be intuitive, it is not in itself cognition and certainly not cognition of a substance.

"[T]his I, or He, or It (the thing), which thinks", it was claimed, cannot be determined in the temporality of inner sense alone. In other words, it is not temporally determinable from the first-person perspective without presupposing spatial objects. This can be seen more clearly through making an attempt. Thus, we grant that the problematic idealist is able (a) to identify and recall representations and memorize their temporal order, (b) that he is able to ascribe these representations to his purely logical self, and (c) that he can, at will, unite a set of intuitive ideas and their recollections to a purely theoretical object.

Now, first we let him say: "I *must* have a permanent existence, since as long as there are perceptions I have to be there too as the perceiver."

But, that personal pronoun, "I", cannot refer to a representation in the inner sense. Since the subject is precisely that which ascribes these representations to itself, it cannot itself be a representation. But if it is not a representation, the problematic idealist's subject cannot be experienced by him at all, or, as Allison puts it, inner sense does not have any data on the "soul as such".[94] This is supported by the fact that the temporal relations "before", "after", "at the same time" etc., which hold between the ideas in inner intuition, cannot be applied by the problematic idealist to his own subject. He cannot say (in the same sense as we do) "before, I was at my desk"—for in relation to what? His "desk" is only a series of ideas.

To this the idealist replies: "I may not be able to relate to my subject 'before' or 'after'. But it is undeniable that I exist *presently* or *as long as* I perceive something and this sufficiently demonstrates my permanence."

We object that the present is not sufficient for determining the subject as a substance in time. Since "there is **only one** time,"[95] the subject has to be relatable to "before" and "after" if it is relatable to "now". For the same reason, it is doubtful that the present is genuinely related to the subject as a substance. This doubt is confirmed when recognizing that the present is related jointly to the subject and to everything there is over and above the subject. Thus, it is not that the idealist cannot relate the present to

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[94] Allison 2004: 278.
[95] A 188/B 232.

himself but that he cannot avoid relating it to too many things at once. Consequently, no backdrop remains in relation to which the subject could determine itself as being in the present.

Put another way, the idealist claimed that he has immediate consciousness of himself as a substance in time, and argued that he must be a persistent thing as long as he perceives something. This "as long as" is intended to determine his subjecthood in time and to prove that he has immediate consciousness of himself. But this appears compelling only because he treats the thin concept of the *ego* as if it were an empirical person. If the ego is already an empirical person, the idealist could view experience as the temporally structured totality of modifications to his substance, that is, as mere ideas or representations. But since the *ego* is only an empty, determinable something and everything else (i.e. the whole "world") is its "modifications", it is no help to say that as long as these modifications occur it has to be "present", since these are viewed in turn as being *relative* to the subject. Consequently, the result of his reasoning amounts to no more than this: "I perceive, therefore I am—the world."

In order to determine itself as a substance in time, the problematic idealist, in inner sense, needs to distinguish changes that are due to him from changes that are due to the way an independent world is. This is precisely the role of the analogies of experience. Kant describes them as "principles of the determination of the existence of appearances in time". Since the application of the analogies results in acknowledging spatial objects, the problematic idealist would cease to be one. But if he refuses to distinguish objective from subjective change, he is left without the possibility of determining himself as a substance in time, simply because there is no other thing left in relation to which that could be done.

The idealist may reply: "I can compound sets of intuitive ideas to theoretical objects, and determine myself as a thinking substance with regard to them."

To this one would reply that assuming hypothetical objects is viable, if the idealist's subject was an empirical person, and the posited objects were in accordance with the unity of experience. But, since the thinking substance *is a theoretical object itself*, it cannot be determined through other theoretical objects compounded of ideas, that is, if the possibility of independent confirmation remains precluded.

5.   A reply to Cassam

In connection with the preceding section, a few words on the analogies of experience are necessary. This will outline a reply to Cassam's charge that transcendental arguments are irrelevant for answering the question of how experience is possible. As stated, applying the analogies draws the line between objective and subjective changes of representations. The second edition of the *Critique* presents a proof for each one of the three analogies of experience. It would be unproblematic to show that these are all transcendental proofs. Accordingly, it is more pressing to clarify their experience-enabling function.

"Experience", Kant explains, is a "kind of cognition requiring the understanding …, whose … rule is expressed in concepts *a priori*, to which all objects of experience must … necessarily conform."[96] Experience, therefore, presupposes the pure concepts of the understanding (i.e., the categories). This is an indication of the experience-enabling function of the categories. Other passages underscore the role of sense-perception: "Experience … is a cognition that determines an object through perceptions." (A 176/B 218) Here, the opposition between the singular of "experience" (*Erfahrung*) and the plural of "perceptions" (*Wahrnehmungen*) suggests the relationship between the two accounts: experience is the *unity* of perceptions in accordance with the rule of understanding.[97] Kant will sometimes even insinuate that talk of "experiences" is derivative and improper, for there is only one experience, of which "experiences" can be no more than parts.[98] It is this "unitary" reading I would like to stress.

We turn then, to the analogies of experience. It is through them that the relational categories (inherence/subsistence, causality and interaction) are applied to objects in time. The third analogy can be phrased like this: "To ascertain a state of affairs as co-present I have to view myself as a substance in space that interacts with them."[99] The following is an illustration of the pertinence of this rule.

A person is standing on a planet and observes a star. It slowly wanders at an acute angle towards the horizon and vanishes. Another star appears and after some time

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[96] B XVII.
[97] Cf. the phrase "synthetic unity of perceptions, i. e., … experience" (A 183/B 226).
[98] A 110/A 230/B 282f.
[99] This formulation departs from Kant's in that it is narrower for reasons of exposition. I prefer Kant's wording in the first edition rather than the second: "All substances, insofar as they are **simultaneous**, stand in thoroughgoing community (i.e., interaction with one another)." (A 211)

it occupies the exact same spot as the first star. It is possible that, contrary to appearance, these two stars (assuming they are not identical) are objectively co-present. This would be the case if the observer moved or was moved by the revolving planet. This situation would be similar to one in which somebody standing in a rectangular room could not bring the opposing corners into one perspective because the room was too large. To experience them as co-present one would have to let the eyes roam from one angle to the other. Despite the fact that only succeeding perceptions of the opposite angles are available, they are there "at the same time".

To achieve such an objective time determination of situations, the subjective and reversible order of perceptions can be helpful only if other sequences are viewed as necessarily fixed. This is where Kant's relational categories come in. The objective temporal order of states of affairs can be ascertained only if one's order of perceptions is viewed as causally dependent on the movements of oneself as a spatio-temporal substance. This "dependency" is the "interaction" in the formulation of the third analogy above. The analogies of experience are rules for how to proceed with passively received perceptions. How the categories make experience possible, that is, what their role is in a systematic and objective unification of perceptions becomes tangible in the analogies, since they can be phrased as instructions on how to proceed.[100] It is hard to see why they should not be, in a radical sense, "ways of knowing" or "pathways to knowledge". And since their validity is established using transcendental arguments, the Kantian approach is no less "means-specific" than Cassam's.

6.   Brains in a vat

In this final section an outline of the Refutation's relationship to Hilary Putnam's brains-in-a-vat scenario will be offered. The way in which a Kantian attitude relates to a more radical sceptic who is prepared to question the inner experience will also be examined. The corresponding problem is introduced in the sole footnote to the Refutation-passage, thus raising the question "do we only have an inner sense but no

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[100] Note that the analogies are not applied to "inner representations" in the usual sense. Instead they allow one to draw the distinction between the inner and the outer in the first instance, and to locate the subject as a corporeal substance in the latter.

outer one, rather merely an outer imagination".[101] Put another way, we concede that we perceive outer things and deal with our perceptions according to the analogies of experience, and ask whether or not we could nevertheless be brains in a vat.[102] The answer is that, obviously, we can.

At first sight, this seems to be a counter example for the conclusion of the Refutation-argument. But, according to the view supported here, the conclusion is a conditional, and being a brain in a vat renders the antecedent just as false as the consequent. It precludes perceptions of external objects as well as self-consciousness as a substance in time.

This first becomes evident when allowing for the possibility of massive deviation between time as it is experienced by the person whose brain is captured and the time the brain really is in a vat. It could be just as is the case when dreaming: a dreamed course of events is experienced as being much longer than the corresponding time of rapid eye movement sleep. Second, to be a brain in a vat undercuts the immediate consciousness of one's body and its parts. If such a person's brain was reconnected with real sense organs, she could learn for example that "her" brain is really the brain of a person who is very similar to somebody she believed to be her father, whereas the person she believed herself to be, was never born.

What is Kant's reaction to the problem of an imaginary outer sense? His answer in the footnote is generally considered to be insufficient.[103] The sketch of a more cogent (and modest) rejoinder can be found in a passage from the Fourth Paralogism of the A-edition: "[I]f [the perceived objects] were not real in space, i.e., immediately given through empirical intuition, then it could not also be invented, because one cannot just think up the real in intuition *a priori*." (A 375) The thought is that empirical content cannot be made up without involving our receptivity. This is true even in the case of dreams and in brains-in-a-vat scenarios. The difference here is that our receptivity is involved in a way that makes it impossible to engender empirical knowledge. But, this is not a strict impossibility, since empirical content can in principle always be retraced

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[101] B 276.

[102] The *locus classicus* reads: "The person's brain … has been removed from the body and placed in a vat of nutrients which keeps the brain alive. The nerve endings have been connected to a super-scientific computer which causes the person whose brain it is to have the illusion that everything is perfectly normal. There seem to be people, objects, the sky, etc." (Putnam 1981: 5f.)

[103] Cf. Allison 2004: 294f.

to its origin, the real.

Here, it is important to note a fundamental difference between the debates. From the start, Putnam concedes the central issue between Kant and Descartes, namely our bodily existence. Consequently, for the person being a brain-in-a-vat, reality is transcendent (empirically inaccessible) only for reasons of physical arrangement. It is in principle accessible if the brain is reconnected with functioning sense-organs. For a subject caught in such an arrangement, the empirical method is the best method for finding out whether the perceived world is real or not, because there could be programming errors causing breaks in the virtual reality so that the subject could begin to suspect that 'reality' is not what it seems to be. In contrast, Descartes's *genius malignus* at least *suggests* that the delusion could be realised by means of supernatural and consequently undetectable influence.[104]

The subject is fooled either causally as in Putnam's thought experiment or by supernatural powers. In the first case, empirical methods would in principle be able to discover the delusion; in the second case, it would remain inscrutable, but without affecting the immanent truth of the assertions that are justified according to our standards. Where everybody is fooled, the unity of nature collapses; the fooling lies beyond possible experience, it is a "transcendent fooling" and therefore inconsequential. As a result, only Putnam's sceptical scenario remains in the field. The Refutation of Idealism is inappropriate for proving that we are not in fact brains-in-a-vat or in similar distress. That question can only be resolved by means of empirical methods. It does not lie within the scope of a transcendental approach.[105]

Bernhard Ritter

Zürich University

ritter@philos.uzh.ch

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[104] Descartes's *genius malignus* is not to be seen as a hypothesis governing the methodical doubt of every stage (consequently not analogous to Putnam's super-scientifc computer); instead the *genius malignus* is the epistemologist's heuristic model whose function is to block propositions from being allowed prematurely due to habit (cf. A.T. VII: 22f.). This is wholly disregarded here.

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THE ROLE OF OBSTACLES AND THEIR ELIMINATION IN CASSAM'S MULTI-LEVELS FRAMEWORK

Simon Sauter

1.

Even though the title may suggest otherwise, *The Possibility of Knowledge*[106] is not so much a book about the tenability of scepticism but rather about the nature of knowledge. This is due to the fact that Cassam is not primarily concerned with establishing the possibility of knowledge but with explaining it. Accordingly, the central question of the book is not "Is knowledge possible?" but rather, given that knowledge is possible:

(HP) How is knowledge possible?

Cassam tackles this question in a piecemeal fashion by answering more restricted questions such as:

(HP$_{ew}$) How is knowledge of the external world possible?

(HP$_{pk}$) How is perceptual knowledge possible?

(HP$_{om}$) How is knowledge of other minds possible?

(HP$_{apk}$) How is a priori knowledge possible?

Cassam calls questions of this kind *how-possible questions* or, in the case of epistemology, epistemological how-possible questions. As knowledge is not something we just have but rather something we have to acquire first, what makes knowledge possible are means of acquiring knowledge. An appropriate answer to an epistemological how-possible question will therefore have to name a means of acquiring knowledge. Cassam calls this a *Means Response* to a how-possible question. But the story doesn't end here.

In general, according to Cassam, how-possible questions arise only when we are baffled by the fact that something that seems impossible to us is still the case. If there is no reason to be surprised by something, we don't usually ask how it is possible. This, of course, applies to epistemological how-possible questions as well. They are therefore

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[106] All page references are to this book.

obstacle-dependent, which is to say that they arise only when there seems to be an insuperable obstacle preventing the kind of knowledge in question. Due to this obstacle-dependence a Means Response alone won't do. In addition, the apparent obstacle has to be eliminated. This can either be accomplished by what Cassam calls an *obstacle-dissipating strategy*, i.e. by showing that the apparent obstacle is not a real obstacle after all, or by what Cassam calls an *obstacle-overcoming strategy*, i.e. by showing that the obstacle, though real, is not as insuperable as it may appear at first glance. A further question that can be asked, given a Means Response, is: what makes it possible to acquire knowledge by the given means? An appropriate answer to this question would list enabling conditions for the acquisition of knowledge via the means in question.

Because of the tripartite nature of this kind of answer to a how-possible question Cassam calls this a *multi-levels response*.[107] On the first level, in the Means Response, a means for acquiring knowledge is identified. On the second level the apparent obstacles to acquiring knowledge by the means in question are removed by either an obstacle-dissipating strategy or by an obstacle-overcoming strategy. On the third level enabling conditions for acquiring knowledge by the means in question are identified. Cassam offers an extensive discussion of Level 3 and its relation to Level 2, arguing that Level 3 responses are possible but usually not necessary (p. 36-50) and that the distinction between Level 2 and Level 3 may not always be sharp (see e.g. p. 20-21). In section II I will try to show that the distinction between Level 1 and Level 2 responses isn't always sharp either and that on occasion no (separate) Level 2 response is necessary. In section III I will argue that theories which offer obstacle-overcoming responses are more conservative than theories which offer obstacle-dissipating responses.

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[107] Cassam introduces his notion of a multi-levels response in section 1.1 of *The Possibility of Knowledge* and explains and discusses it throughout the whole book. For a crisp summary see p. 9-10.

2.

Consider the opening paragraph of *The Possibility of Knowledge*, where Cassam gives an example (originally given by William Dray) of a (non-epistemological) how-possible question: a radio announcer reports that a fielder in a baseball game has just caught a ball that otherwise would have hit high up on the fence (p. 1). The obvious question, given that the fence is 20 feet high, is:

(HP$_{cb}$) How was it possible for the player to catch the ball 20 feet off the ground?

Cassam uses this example only to introduce the notion of a how-possible question and does not offer a multi-levels response to it. This is a little unfortunate as this seems to me to be an example where the first and the second level of Cassam's framework fuse. So, what could a multi-levels response to (HP$_{cb}$) look like? A first level response might be that the player moved within arms length of the ball, reached out and grabbed it. The obstacle then is the fact that it seems impossible for the player to get within arms length of the ball. So a second level response is needed. It is that the player used a ladder that was attached to the scorekeeper's platform. So we have a Means Response, an obstacle, and an obstacle-overcoming strategy. On this interpretation there is an obvious means for catching balls which in the case at hand seems to be insufficient to perform the task. Therefore we need to supplement the Means Response with an obstacle-overcoming response. But in the example we are not just asking about the means to catch a ball but about the means for catching a ball 20 feet off the ground. And there is no obvious means for a player to catch a ball 20 feet off the ground during a baseball game. So the problem is not that the obvious means are insufficient, but rather that there is no obvious means. So we can't overcome the obstacle by showing how the means can be sufficient after all, but rather by naming a means for catching the ball 20 feet off the ground in the first place. The obstacle consists not in the apparent insufficiency of means but in the apparent unavailability of means. Therefore calling attention to the ladder is not only an obstacle-dissipating response but also a Means Response. Once the Means Response is given, there are no more obstacles to be eliminated and accordingly there is no need for a separate Level 2 response. On this construal the first and the second level of Cassam's framework fuse in this case.

The baseball example is not a rare exception, as becomes clear when we take a closer look at one of Cassam's central examples for how-possible questions and multi-levels responses, viz. Kant's explanation of the supposed possibility of synthetic a priori knowledge. Cassam interprets Kant's answer to the question:

(HP$_{sap}$) How is synthetic a priori knowledge possible?

as a multi-levels response. However, there seems to be an ambiguity in the characterisation of what Cassam takes to be Kant's Means Response. The question (HP$_{sap}$) arises due to what Cassam calls the *problem of sources*: the problem that there seems to be no source of synthetic a priori knowledge. The reason is that there are only two obvious sources of knowledge: experience and conceptual analysis. But as experience can't be a source of a priori knowledge and conceptual analysis can't be a source of synthetic knowledge, neither can be the source of synthetic a priori knowledge.

Before focusing on Kant's response to (HP$_{sap}$) Cassam sketches three possible *presupposed sources solutions* to the problem that, even though there seems to be no source of synthetic a priori knowledge, in mathematics we seem to have synthetic a priori knowledge, which try to show that either experience or conceptual analysis can be the source of mathematical knowledge by denying either that mathematical truths are synthetic or that they are necessary or that experience can't be the source of knowledge of necessary truths. Then he goes on to give a sketch of Kant's *additional sources solution* which posits construction in pure intuition as a third source of knowledge. It is important to note that Cassam categorizes these four possible solutions as obstacle-dissipating responses (p. 12-13). About Kant's response he writes:

> [Kant's] solution is an *additional sources* solution since it involves the positing of what he calls 'construction in pure intuition' as an additional source of knowledge by reference to which at least the possibility of geometrical knowledge be accounted for. [...] Viewed in one way, the additional sources solution looks like an obstacle-overcoming rather than an obstacle-dissipating response to (HP$_{sap}$) [...] Viewed in another way, however, Kant's solution to the problem of sources looks more dissipationist. (p. 12)

There can be no doubt that in this passage Cassam treats Kant's positing of construction in pure intuition as a Level 2 response. Yet, he also treats Kant's positing of construction in pure intuition as a source of knowledge as a Level 1 response to (HP_{sap}):

> To construct a figure in pure intuition is to 'draw' it in the imagination, and Kant's proposal is that the construction of geometrical concepts in pure intuition is a genuinely non-conceptual, non-empirical means of coming to know geometrical truths, and therefore a means of acquiring synthetic a priori knowledge. In my terms, this is a Level 1 response to (HP_{sap}). (p. 13)

So first Cassam treats Kant's proposal as an obstacle-dissipating and therefore a Level 2 response and then he treats it as a Means and therefore Level 1 Response. This is, in fact, completely appropriate. After all, the obstacle because of which (HP_{sap}) has to be asked is that there seems to be no means of acquiring synthetic a priori knowledge. Therefore the obstacle can only be eliminated by naming a means of acquiring synthetic a priori knowledge. But this would be at once a Means Response *and* an obstacle-eliminating response. So, like in the baseball example, the first and the second level get fused. Again, what we have is a response which is at once a Level 1 and a Level 2 response − just as you should expect when the obstacle which gives rise to a how-possible question is the apparent unavailability of means.

But Cassam argues that Kant gave a separate Level 2 response to (HP_{sap}) (p. 14-15). Doesn't that contradict my claim that the obstacle that motivates (HP_{sap}) is removed by the Level 1 response? So far I have pointed out similarities between the baseball example and the Kant example. But there is one very important difference between the two cases. In the baseball example the obstacle is that there seems to be no means available in the situation at hand. But of course we do know means of catching a ball 20 feet above the ground: standing on the roof of a building, using a ladder, using a net with a 15 foot handle, etc. The only problem is that we expect that none of these means is available to a player during a baseball game. In the case of synthetic a priori knowledge the problem is far more serious: the obstacle here is that there seems to be no means that could do the task at all. Whereas in the baseball example the question is how that player in that situation could catch the ball, in the case of synthetic a priori knowledge the question is how anybody could in any situation acquire synthetic a priori knowledge.

It is this general scope of the problem that makes an additional sources solution necessary. As Kant cannot simply point out that a means that we thought to be unavailable in a certain situation is available after all, he has to introduce the notion of a completely different source of knowledge. Accordingly, it is not enough for him to give a Means Response to (HP$_{sap}$) but, as Cassam points out, he has also to answer another how-possible question, viz.:

> [H]ow is it possible for construction in pure intuition to be a source of
> synthetic a priori knowledge? (p. 14)

And Kant's second level response is aimed at removing the obstacle which gives rise to *this* question. Thus in Cassam's reconstruction of Kant's theory of synthetic a priori knowledge there are two obstacles, not one. The first obstacle is that there seems to be no means of acquiring knowledge that is at once synthetic and a priori. This obstacle is dissipated by an additional sources response which is at the same time a Means Response and an obstacle-eliminating response to (HP$_{sap}$). But once the Means Response is given, there emerges a second obstacle, giving rise to the second how-possible question: it seems that construction in pure intuition cannot account for the universality of synthetic a priori knowledge. This problem, according to Cassam, is overcome by Kant's Schematism (p. 14-15).

So there is an important difference between the obstacle in the baseball example and the obstacle that gives rise to (HP$_{sap}$): unlike the latter the former is contingent. Still, in both cases Level 1 and Level 2 get fused, so both obstacles are different from those obstacles where the Means Response and the obstacle-eliminating response are clearly distinct. These come in a contingent and a non-contingent variety, too. We can therefore distinguish between four kinds of obstacles which can give rise to how-possible questions: the contingent insufficiency of means, the contingent unavailability of means, the non-contingent insufficiency of means, and the non-contingent unavailability of means. First, there are contingent obstacles which seem to make a given means insufficient for some task. This can be illustrated with a variation of Cassam's Eurostar example: when (unaware of the existence of the Channel Tunnel) we ask how it was possible for someone to get from London to Paris by train, we are not just asking how he could do this, say, on a Saturday, or at noon; we wonder how anyone can do this ever. On the other hand, we do not thereby doubt that there is such a thing as train travel

or that there is some reason why it should be impossible in principle to build a bridge across or a tunnel beneath the Channel but only that there actually is a bridge or tunnel and thus that train travel is a sufficient means to get from London to Paris. Second, there is the obstacle that even though sufficient means to achieve a certain aim exist, they seem to be unavailable in the situation at hand. This is the case in the baseball example. We do know means of catching balls 20 feet off the ground, but we simply assume that these means are unavailable to baseball players during a game. Third, there are non-contingent obstacles which seem to make a given means insufficient for some task. Sceptical hypotheses are examples of this kind of obstacle: if, in order to acquire knowledge, we have to know that sceptical hypotheses are false, then the possibility of sceptical scenarios is a non-contingent obstacle, as it is not a contingent feature but the nature of sceptical hypotheses that it seems impossible to rule them out. Still, it is not the purpose of these hypotheses to raise doubts about the existence of perception but rather about its sufficiency for the acquisition of knowledge. Finally, there is the obstacle that there seems to exist no means for achieving a certain aim at all. This is exemplified by (HP_{sap}). We are not just puzzled by the fact that synthetic a priori knowledge can be acquired in certain situations or using this means or that, but by the (supposed) fact that it can be acquired at all.

Obstacles of the first and second kind are rather harmless as they are completely contingent, in cases where they can be eliminated at all they can usually be easily eliminated by gathering further information about the situation in question. There can be obstacles to the acquisition of knowledge which belong to this category, e.g. we can ask how it is possible for a blind person to know that the sky is blue, but, being contingent, these obstacles are of no special interest to epistemologists.[108]

The third kind of obstacles is far more serious, especially when there is no other means available. This kind of obstacle makes how-possible questions far more pressing than the contingent obstacles of type one. A person who hears on the radio that a baseball player caught a ball 20 feet off the ground will wonder what kind of means the player may have used, but he probably won't be saying that it is plainly impossible. Yet, that is the typical reaction of sceptics to claims of knowledge.

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[108] Cassam makes the same point about contingent obstacles in a different context (p. 29-30).

The apparent non-contingent unavailability of means is an even more pressing problem. The abundance of anti-sceptical theories in epistemology shows that, even though there seem to be obstacles to the acquisition of perceptual knowledge, someone who is convinced that we do have perceptual knowledge will most likely be able to at least speculate how it may be possible anyway. But almost no-one who is convinced that neither experience nor conceptual analysis can yield synthetic a priori knowledge and never heard about Kant or construction in pure intuition will even be able to think of a way how synthetic a priori knowledge might be possible after all.

Obstacles of the first and third kind, discussed by Cassam, are obstacles that seem to prevent the acquisition of knowledge by a given means. This kind of obstacle can, at least sometimes, either be dissipated or overcome. As illustrated in the baseball example and in Cassam's reconstruction of Kant's answer to (HP_{sap}) the second and fourth kind of obstacle can sometimes be dissipated. But is it also possible to overcome obstacles of these kinds? If, as I have assumed earlier, knowledge is something that has to be acquired, the answer is no. Given that there is no means for acquiring knowledge of some kind and knowledge is only possible if it can be acquired, then knowledge of the kind in question is simply not possible. If, on the other hand, not every kind of knowledge has to be acquired, i.e. if some knowledge is just "given", then for that kind of knowledge the obstacle that there is no means of acquiring it can be overcome by showing that this kind of knowledge doesn't have to be acquired because it is just there, e.g. because it is a form of innate knowledge.

3.

Even though Cassam distinguishes between two kinds of obstacle-elimination strategies, he does not discuss whether it makes any difference which kind of strategy is used. There is some good reason for taking them to be on a par: after all, we can expect that in most cases only one of them can be adequate. If the obstacle in question is real, we have to use an obstacle-overcoming strategy, if it is not, we have to use an obstacle-dissipating strategy. We cannot simply choose what kind of strategy we want to use. But on the other hand, it might still be the case that we can learn something of interest by paying attention to whether we have to use an obstacle-overcoming or an obstacle-dissipating strategy. That is, we might learn something about the kind of knowledge in

question by determining whether the apparent obstacle is real or not. As long as we are only interested in determining how knowledge is possible, it is not important how we eliminate the obstacle; all that matters is that we eliminate it. If, on the other hand, we want to learn something about the nature of the kind of knowledge in question, it may well be worth to give the matter a second glance.

Consider the following two examples of obstacle-elimination strategies:

(a) James, who lives in London, tells his friend Sarah that he is going on a trip to Paris. Being aware that James is afraid both of flying and of taking a ship, Sarah asks James how he will travel. James answers that he will take the train. Sarah asks him, "How is it possible to travel to Paris by train? You can't cross the Channel by train!" James reminds her that there is a tunnel beneath the Channel and tells her that he will take the Eurostar to Paris.

(b) George, who is in Europe for the first time in his life, has spent a couple of days in London and now wants to continue his travel with a short trip to Edinburgh. As he is afraid of flying, he asks the travel agent what alternatives there are to get to Edinburgh. The travel agent tells him that the easiest way would be to take the train. But believing that Edinburgh is the capital of Ireland, George asks: "How is it possible to travel to Edinburgh by train? You can't cross the sea between England and Ireland by train!" The travel agent informs him that Edinburgh is not the capital of Ireland but the capital of Scotland and that therefore train travel between London and Edinburgh is perfectly possible.

George and Sarah ask their how-possible questions for the same reason: both believe that between London and a certain place there lies the sea and that you can't cross the sea by train. But James and the travel agent give very different obstacle-eliminating responses. Whereas James gives an obstacle-overcoming response, explaining that it is possible to cross the Channel by train through the Channel Tunnel, the travel agent

gives an obstacle-dissipating response, explaining that George won't have to cross the sea, as Edinburgh is not the capital of Ireland but the capital of Scotland. Whereas Sarah learns that James can do something which she considered to be impossible, George learns that Edinburgh is not what he believed it to be and that therefore he doesn't have to do what he expected in order to get to Edinburgh. George is, so to say, wrong about the "nature" of Edinburgh.

So an obstacle-overcoming response claims that the person asking the how-possible question was mistaken about what is possible, whereas an obstacle-dissipating response claims that the person was mistaken about the "nature" of the thing in question. Thus, George is mistaken about where he is going (Scotland not Ireland) and therefore about what he has to accomplish to get there. Similarly, a person who wonders how the baseball player could catch the ball 20 feet off the ground is mistaken in believing that he had no aid available. And someone who asks how synthetic a priori knowledge is possible is, according to Kant, mistaken in believing that knowledge must be taken either from experience or from conceptual analysis. Sarah, on the other hand, is not mistaken in believing that James has to cross the Channel but in believing that there is no way to do this by train.

The same applies to epistemological how-possible questions. When someone, let's call him David, asks how a certain kind of knowledge is possible, he does so because he believes that there is an obstacle that prevents us from acquiring that kind of knowledge. In cases where an obstacle-overcoming response is given, David learns that we can do more than he thought we could, whereas in cases where an obstacle-dissipating response is given, he learns that we don't have to do what he expected in order to acquire the kind of knowledge in question. So in the first case he learns that our cognitive access to the world is less limited than he believed it was. In the second case he learns that the kind of knowledge in question is not what he thought it was, i.e. that he was wrong about the nature of knowledge. So when we give an obstacle-overcoming response to David's question, we tell him that he is right about the requirements for the acquisition of knowledge, but we correct him in explaining to him how these requirements can be met. When we give him an obstacle-dissipating response, we tell him that he is wrong about the nature of knowledge and ask him to revise his concept of knowledge. In this sense epistemological theories which give an obstacle-overcoming

response are more conservative than theories which give an obstacle-dissipating response and ask us to revise our concept of knowledge and are thus revisionist in nature. The two kinds of obstacle-removing responses are therefore not on a par, and we can expect some insights from paying attention to whether a response belongs to the obstacle-overcoming category or to the obstacle-dissipating category.

We can use the distinction between obstacle-overcoming and obstacle-dissipating strategies to evaluate the measure of conservativeness an epistemological theory has. In order to do this, we have to transpose theories of knowledge into Cassam's multi-levels framework and determine what kind of obstacle-removing response they imply. We can quite easily do this, because the obstacles which motivate epistemological how-possible questions also figure in the motivation for scepticism. Thus, in Cassam's framework scepticism is the theory that there are obstacles to the acquisition of knowledge which can be neither dissipated nor overcome. Therefore, we can extract the obstacle-eliminating strategies of epistemological theories by considering how they deal with the sceptical challenge. It has become common to present the problem of scepticism in the form of a paradox. The problem according to this presentation is that there are certain claims about knowledge which are all intuitively plausible to the extent that they appear to be mere platitudes but which are inconsistent taken together. These are:

(1) We have knowledge about many things.

(2) If we don't know that we are not the victims of systematic illusion, we know (almost) nothing.

(3) We cannot know that we are not the victims of systematic illusion, because it is the very nature of illusion that it seems real, so that we cannot discriminate between illusion and reality.

The apparent obstacle to the acquisition of knowledge of the external world is therefore that it seems that, in order to acquire knowledge, we have to know that certain sceptical hypotheses are wrong, which we cannot possibly know. Thus, there are two basic possibilities for denying scepticism: denying that, in order to acquire knowledge, we have to know that sceptical hypotheses are wrong, or affirming that we can know that

sceptical hypotheses are wrong after all. These two possibilities correspond to the two varieties of obstacle-removing strategies described by Cassam: the first is an obstacle-dissipating response, whereas the second is an obstacle-overcoming response.

Thus, closure-denying theories like Dretske's conclusive reasons account or Nozick's truth-tracking account are highly revisionist.[109] This fact explains why so few philosophers are willing to even seriously consider discarding the closure principle. But this does not mean that all closure-retaining theories are conservative. They surely are less revisionist than closure-denying theories, but how conservative they are depends on how they propose to overcome the obstacle of having to know that sceptical hypotheses are false. For certainly there seems to be an obstacle to knowing this, too. Actually, the fact that knowledge that sceptical hypotheses are false seems to be a prerequisite for knowing anything else only poses an obstacle because there seem to be quite obvious obstacles to the acquisition of the knowledge that sceptical hypotheses are false. So when faced with an obstacle-overcoming response to (HP$_{ew}$) we can ask further:

(HP$_{sh}$) How is it possible to know that sceptical hypotheses are false?

The problem that gives rise to (HP$_{sh}$) is that we seem to be unable to rule out the possibility that all our experiences may mislead us to believe that we are not dreaming, or that we are not brains in a vat, etc. when in fact we are. We simply cannot, it seems, rule out all sceptical alternatives. Here we are again faced with two kinds of possible strategies: obstacle-dissipating strategies, claiming that in order to know that sceptical possibilities are not actualized, we do not have to rule out every alternative, and obstacle-overcoming strategies, claiming that it is possible to rule out sceptical scenarios. Again, the obstacle-dissipating strategy is revisionist as it claims that we were wrong about the nature of knowledge, whereas the obstacle-overcoming strategy is more conservative as it claims that our cognitive access to the world is less limited than it appears. But again, we have to enquire further how the apparent obstacle is to be overcome before we can determine just how conservative any given obstacle-overcoming response is. The reason is that, given an obstacle-overcoming response, we can always ask at this point:

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[109] For Dretske's account see his (1971) and his (2005); for Nozick's account see his (1981).

(HP$_{aa}$) How is it possible to rule out all alternatives?

For it seems plausible that, in order to rule out sceptical scenarios, we have to be able to distinguish them from non-sceptical scenarios; after all, if I wouldn't notice if I were the victim of a sceptical scenario, then how can I rule out the possibility that I actually am such a victim? Here we are faced with an obstacle that clearly cannot be overcome, as it is the very nature of sceptical scenarios that they are indistinguishable from non-sceptical scenarios. Therefore, the only option available here is an obstacle-dissipating strategy, showing how we can rule out possibilities without being able to distinguish them from the actual state of the world.

Some readers will complain by now that on my construal the only conservative position is scepticism: there is no possible obstacle-overcoming response to (HP$_{aa}$) and therefore no anti-sceptical theory which is at no point revisionist. Moreover, since it seems reasonable to assume that conservatism is the default position, it seems that at each junction I lay the burden of proof on the anti-sceptic: closure-retaining theories are more conservative than closure-denying theories, infallibilist theories are more conservative than fallibilist theories, and internalist theories are more conservative than externalist theories. The rationale is that if there is a serious reason for asking a how-possible question in the first place, then an obstacle-dissipating response cannot be conservative. If it were conservative to assume that baseball players can use ladders during baseball games, there would be no point in asking (HP$_{cb}$). If it wouldn't be revisionist to assume that we can acquire synthetic a priori knowledge through construction in pure intuition, Kant wouldn't have had to raise (HP$_{sap}$). Therefore, epistemologists who want to count one of the theories which I have classified as being at one point or other revisionist as conservative would have to show that the apparent obstacles which the theory in question dissipates are not intuitive at all but the product of mistaken theorizing. This in turn would imply that scepticism has no pretheoretical bite and that really there is no such thing as a sceptical paradox, because the principles which would be needed to establish it are not platitudinous at all but rather highly artificial products of philosophical theory-building.

Considering that most epistemologists claim that their theories of knowledge capture our everyday concept of knowledge and best concord with our everyday use of the word "knowledge" and with our pretheoretical intuitions about knowledge claims, the claim that most of these theories are revisionist may easily be misunderstood as the claim that these theories are all wrong. For this reason I want to emphasize two points. First, as I have just noted, theories are only revisionist if the obstacles they dissipate are not just products of mistaken theorizing. So unless these principles really are as intuitively plausible as some epistemologists believe, theories which offer dissipating instead of overcoming strategies are not revisionist at all.

The second point I want to emphasize is that a theory of knowledge can be revisionist or conservative in more than one way. So far I discussed only the acceptance or denial of certain epistemic principles. Let's call a theory which denies an intuitively plausible epistemic principle *principle-revisionist* and a theory which accepts it *principle-conservative*. In these terms scepticism may be the only completely principle-conservative epistemology. But of course an epistemologist cannot simply rely on what epistemic principles people intuitively assent to; we also have to consider our everyday use of the word "knowledge" and our pretheoretical intuitions concerning knowledge claims. Call a theory which respects our everyday use of "knowledge" as well as our intuitive judgments about knowledge claims *use-conservative* and a theory which for some reason discards them *use-revisionist*. As we all know, when asked, people subscribe to many principles which they fail to live up to. Thus, there is no reason to expect that principle-conservatism will always go hand in hand with use-conservatism. It is therefore perfectly possible that some theory of knowledge best captures our everyday use of "knowledge" and our intuitions about knowledge-claims while at the same time being principle-revisionist. In fact, one possible explanation of the sceptical paradox is that no theory of knowledge can be principle-conservative and use-conservative at the same time. Thus denying (1) is certainly use-revisionist, while denying (2) or (3) is probably principle-revisionist.[110]

Simon Sauter

Heidelberg University

Simon.Sauter@stud.uni-heidelberg.de

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THE POSSIBILITY OF KNOWLEDGE: REPLY TO DENIS BUEHLER, DANIEL DOHRN, DAVID LÜTHI, BERNARD RITTER AND SIMON SAUTER

Quassim Cassam

I thank Denis Bühler, Daniel Dohrn, Daniel Lüthi, Bernhard Ritter and Simon Sauter for their responses. They are all, to varying degrees, sceptical about the central ideas of my book. I will not try to address all their objections here but will focus instead on three major areas of concern: (1) the clarity and applicability of the multi-levels model, (2) my account of means of knowing, and (3) my discussion of transcendental arguments.

1.   The Multi-Levels Model

To be more precise, they worry that the multi-levels model is less illuminating than I suppose (Buehler, Dohrn, Lüthi, Sauter), that my account of means of knowing is not adequate (Buehler, Dohrn), and that I underestimate what transcendental arguments can achieve (Dohrn, Lüthi, Ritter). I am unpersuaded by their arguments in relation to (1) and (3) but agree that more needs to be said about means of knowing. In this section I will defend the multi-levels model. In the next section I will flesh out the notion of a means of knowing. Finally, I will take another look at transcendental arguments.

> Here are three specific concerns about the multi-levels models:
>
> (a) One or other of the first two levels of a multi-levels response to an epistemological how possible question is superfluous.
>
> (b) There isn't a clear distinction between Level 1 and Level 2.
>
> (c) The model doesn't apply smoothly to some of the actual how-possible questions that I discuss in the book.

Starting with (a), Dohrn writes that 'the question is why level 1 questions must be answered at all' (p. 7). His point is that if how-possible questions are obstacle-dependent then surely all we need to do in order to answer the question is to tackle the obstacle. This is something that happens at Level 2 rather than Level 1 so why is Level 1 necessary at all? One reason is that the obstacles that get tackled at Level 2 are precisely obstacles to the acquisition of knowledge by the means identified at Level 1.

In this sense, Level 2 presupposes Level 1. For example, consider the claim that it is possible for us to perceive what we do without thereby knowing something about the world around us. This is supposed to represent an obstacle to the acquisition of knowledge of the external world by means of the senses but it is only a significant obstacle to our knowing anything about the world around us on the assumption that perceiving *is*, for us, a means of knowing about the world around us. In general, if M has not been singled out at Level 1 as a means by which we know things there would be little point in our trying to demonstrate that there are no insuperable obstacles to the acquisition of knowledge by M.

A different way of developing (a) is to argue that it is Level 2 rather than Level 1 that is superfluous. As Dohrn puts it:

> If how-possible questions are not devoted to removing salient obstacles but to exhibiting means to acquire a certain knowledge, the function of level 2 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 obstacle incomplete unless obstacles are tackled? (p. 29)

In my view, how-possible questions *are* obstacle-dependent and *do* therefore call for the removal of salient obstacles. Still, Dohrn asks a reasonable question. Consider a position that might be called *extreme minimalism*.[111] The extreme minimalist argues that explaining how knowledge of kind K is possible is simply a matter of identifying means M by which it is possible. On this account, tackling obstacles to the acquisition of K by M is, like the project of identifying enabling conditions for acquiring K by M, an optional extra. We can, if we like, engage with specific obstacles as and when they arise but a need for obstacle-removal is not built in to the very idea of answering an epistemological how-possible question. In these terms, Dohrn's question is: what is wrong with extreme minimalism?

What is wrong with it is that if epistemological how-possible questions are obstacle-generated then Level 2 cannot be an optional extra. That is, if the question we are trying to answer is 'How is X possible given the various factors that make it look impossible?' a philosophically satisfying and relevant answer cannot ignore the factors that make X look impossible. Even if there are no genuine obstacles to the acquisition of K by M, *showing* that this is so still counts as an exercise in obstacle-removal. Perhaps, in that case, what the extreme minimalist is questioning is the thesis of obstacle-dependence itself. However, this thesis is correct. Consider the difference between the following challenges:

(5) How do you know that P?

(6) How is it possible for you to know that P?

The first of these questions can be asked pointedly, with the implication that perhaps you don't know. It can also asked out of what Austin calls 'respectful curiosity' (1979: 78). If I assert that P and someone asks me how I know that P this might simply be a request for information, with no implication that I don't know that P. (II) is different from (I) precisely because it does imply an obstacle.[112] As McDowell points out, a good first step in responding to (II) would be to ask the questioner 'Why exactly does it look to you, and why should it look to me, as if P is *not* possible?'.[113] It would be bizarre for the person who asked (II) to respond by saying 'Well, I never suggested that it looks to me as if P is not possible'. In asking (II) rather than (I) one *is* implying that it looks as if P is not possible and that is why we need to take an interest in the factors that make P look impossible.

The discussion so far suggests that Levels 1 and 2 are interdependent. The obstacles that are the focus of Level 2 are obstacles to the acquisition of knowledge by Level 1 means of knowing, and the removal of these obstacles vindicates the supposition that the supposed means really are means of knowing. Does this mean that, as Sauter puts it, Levels 1 and 2 get 'fused' (p. 6) in the story that I tell? Yes, if this is

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[112] William Dray made this point many years ago. See Dray (1957).

[113] See McDowell (1998: 58).

simply a vivid way of making the point that the first two levels of the multi-levels model are interdependent. Does this interdependence have the effect of collapsing the distinction between Level 1 and Level 2? Sauter seems to think that it does, and this is the point of (b). A good way of assessing this charge is to take a closer look at the relation between Levels 1 and 2 of Kant's multi-levels response to the question 'How is synthetic *a priori* geometrical knowledge possible?'. As Lüthi points out, this is a question to which one would expect the multi-levels model to apply most straightforwardly but both he and Sauter argue that there are problems for the model even in relation to this question.

The specific problem that exercises both Sauter and Lüthi is this: if, as I claim, the obstacle to the existence of synthetic *a priori* knowledge that leads Kant to ask how such knowledge is possible is the problem of means, that is, the supposed absence of means of gaining such knowledge, then the identification of construction in pure intuition as a *bona fide* means of acquiring synthetic *a priori* geometrical knowledge is *itself* an exercise in obstacle-removal. This exercise in obstacle-removal takes place at Level 1 but in the multi-levels model obstacle-removal is supposed to be something that happens at Level 2 rather than at Level 1. If the identification of means of knowing is a form of obstacle-removal then nothing separates Levels 1 and 2. So what we have here is a concrete illustration of both (b) and (c).

Contrary to what this objection assumes I do not deny that what happens at Level 1 can have an obstacle-removing function. Indeed, Sauter quotes a passage from my book in which I make precisely this point in connection with Kant's account of geometry.[114] In positing construction in intuition as a source of geometrical knowledge, Kant is tackling an obstacle to the existence of this kind of knowledge - the absence of means of acquiring it - but Kant's solution only works if construction in intuition really is a source of synthetic *a priori* knowledge. In drawing attention to the role of construction in geometry Kant is emphasizing the fact that geometrical proofs, as he understands them, are diagrammatic. Yet the particularity of the diagrams that figure in geometrical proofs represents an apparent obstacle to our acquiring *a priori* knowledge on the basis of such proofs. The reason is that *a priori* knowledge is, at least for Kant, a form of universal knowledge. The mathematician considers the universal in the

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[114] See Cassam (2007a: 12).

particular, and it is not clear how such a thing is possible. I call this the problem of universality and argue that this is problem that Kant is addressing at Level 2 of his account. So the distinction between the two levels of Kant's account is the distinction between positing means of acquiring geometrical knowledge and eliminating an obstacle to the acquisition of geometrical knowledge by the posited means.

Lüthi is doubtful about this way of proceeding because he doubts the reality of the problem of universality. He thinks that this is not an intuitive problem and that most of the real work in Kant's account is done by the identification of means of acquiring geometrical knowledge. This cannot be right. The main issue for Kant is not whether geometrical proof is diagrammatic – he thought that was obvious- but whether and how it is possible for the geometer to consider the universal in the particular. This is a problem that exercises Locke and Berkeley and also one that exercises Kant. He tries to solve it by giving an account of what makes it possible for us to consider the universal in the particular. What makes this possible, he argues in the Schematism, is the fact that construction in intuition is determined by certain universal conditions or rules of construction. These are the schemata of geometrical concepts. However, the schemata are not themselves *means* of knowing even if they guide the constructions by means of which we acquire geometrical knowledge. Kant's Level 2 response to the problem of universality is, to this extent, quite different from his Level 1 response to the problem of means, even though the problems are linked. The multi-levels analysis tries to do justice to these aspects of Kant's discussion, and I am not persuaded that there is much wrong with this analysis.

2.   Means of Knowing

The next issue concerns the notion of a means of knowing. Both Dohrn and Buehler object that I fail to explain what counts as a means of knowing. Dohrn raises the possibility of our claiming to know without being in a position to specify means of knowing, and Ritter asks why the Kantian categories cannot be means of knowing. Each of these points merits a response so let me start by fleshing out my conception of means of knowing.

The example I give of a means of knowing is seeing that P. What makes seeing that P a means of knowing that P? Contrary to what I sometimes suggest in the book the

answer cannot be that means of knowing are means of *coming* to know.[115] Remembering that P is a means of knowing that P but remembering that P is not, in normal circumstances, a means of coming to know that P. I know that I had eggs for breakfast but I did not come to know this by remembering that I had eggs for breakfast. Perhaps, in that case, it might be held that Φ-ing that P is a means of knowing that P if and only if 'S Φs that P' *entails* 'S knows that P'. This allows seeing that P and remembering that P to come out as means of knowing that P but there are other reasons for not thinking of means of knowing in this way.[116] For 'S knows that P' and 'S regrets that P' both entail 'S knows that P' but neither knowing that P not regretting that P is a means of knowing that P.[117] Why not? Because one cannot properly be said to know that P *by* knowing that P, or *by* regretting that P. So the fact that 'S Φs that P' entails 'S knows that P' is not sufficient for Φ-ing that P to be a means of knowing that P. It isn't necessary either. Reading that P can be a means of knowing that P but 'S read that P' clearly does not entail 'S knows that P'. In addition, means of knowing needn't be propositional. Hearing the baby crying is a means of knowing that she is crying but it is not a relation to a proposition and so does not entail knowing.

What do seeing that P, remembering that P and reading that P have in common in virtue of which they all qualify as means of knowing? And what is it about knowing that P and regretting that P that makes it inappropriate to regard them as means of knowing? On an *explanatory* conception of means of knowing, which is the conception I endorse, Φ-ing that P is a means of knowing that P only if it is possible to explain how S knows that P by reference to the fact that S Φs that P. So, for example, S's knowledge that it is raining can in principle be explained by reference to the fact that he can see that it is raining. If it is too dark for S to see anything then it is obviously not a good explanation of his knowledge to say that he can see that it is raining but if he *can* see that it is raining, or see the rain, that may well be how he knows. Similarly, my knowledge that I had eggs for breakfast is, in principle, explicable by reference to my remembering having had eggs for breakfast. Even if I regret having had eggs for

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[115] Timothy Williamson persuaded me of this.

[116] This assumes that 'S sees that P' and 'S remembers that P' both entail 'S knows that P'. These entailments are, as Williamson points out, not uncontroversial. See Williamson (2000: 37) and Cassam (2007b) for more on this issue.

[117] Unger (1975) defends the claim that 'S regrets that P' entails 'S knows that P'.

breakfast, and 'S regrets that P' entails that 'S knows that P', pointing out that I regret having had eggs for breakfast is, in most circumstances a very poor answer to 'How do you know you had eggs for breakfast?'. An even worse answer would be 'Because I know I did'.

The challenge is to understand why the fact that 'S Φs that P' entails 'S knows that P' is neither sufficient nor necessary for Φ-ing that P to be a means of knowing that P. It is not sufficient because the fact that 'S Φs that P' entails 'S knows that P' leaves it open that 'By Φ-ing that P' is a poor explanation of S's knowing that P. It is not necessary because the fact that 'S Φs that P' does *not* entail 'S knows that P' leaves it open that 'By Φ-ing that P' is a good explanation of S's knowing that P. How do I know that Quine was born in Akron? I read it in his autobiography. This is a genuine explanation of my knowledge, even though there is no entailment here.

Now consider an example from Austin.[118] S announces that there is a bittern at the bottom of his garden and we ask him how he knows. His answer is: 'I was brought up in the Fens'. This might be a perfectly good answer to the question. Yet being brought up in the Fens is not a means of knowing that there is a bittern at the bottom of one's garden. What this shows is that only some answers to the question 'How do you know?' pick out means of knowing. If Φ-ing that P is to be a means of knowing that P, then one can know that P *by* Φ-ing that P. S does not know that there is a bittern at the bottom of his garden *by* being brought up in the Fens, even if his having been brought up in the Fens is what put him in a position to know that what is at the bottom of his garden is indeed a bittern and not some other kind of bird.

This discussion has a bearing on Ritter's interesting suggestion that the categories – concepts like *cause* and *substance* – can be regarded as means of knowing or pathways to knowledge. Suppose that the knowledge in question is my knowledge that the laptop on which I am writing these words is silver, and that I know that the laptop is dusty by seeing that it is silver. Let us agree, in addition, that categorial concepts are implicated in this form of seeing. To see that my laptop is dusty I need the concept *laptop* and possession of this concept depends upon a capacity for categorial thinking. While this would justify the claim that the categories have what Ritter calls an 'experience-enabling function', it would still not entitle one to regard them as *means* by

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[118] See Austin 1979.

which I know that my laptop is silver. I do not know that my laptop is silver, or anything else for that matter, *by* thinking categorially. Categorial thinking is an enabling condition for the acquisition of perceptual knowledge and not a means by which it is acquired. It puts one in a position to know that P by seeing that P, but it is seeing that P that is one's means of knowing in such cases.

If the explanatory conception of means of knowing is along the right lines what are we to make of the possibility of someone knowing that P without being in a position to specify his means of knowing? There is no need for the explanatory conception to deny that this is a genuine possibility. It can happen that I know that P without knowing how I know. It doesn't follow that in such cases there is no answer to the question 'How do you know?. It only follows that the knower does not always know the answer and hence is not always in a position to *specify* his means of knowing. In Michael Ayers' terminology, knowledge in which the knower knows how he knows might be thought of as 'primary' but this is not to deny the existence of non-primary or secondary knowledge.[119] Presumably, many non-human animals know things about their environment without knowing how they know.

It is one thing to think of means of knowing in explanatory terms. It is another thing to think that in every case in which S knows that P there must *be* an answer to the question 'How does S know?'. Why might one think that there must be an answer to this question? One idea is that knowledge is a cognitive achievement, a destination which S must have done something to reach.[120] If, in a case in which S does know that P, the question 'How does S knows that P?' has no answer then this picture of knowledge will have to be abandoned. Self-knowledge is a case in point.[121] Davidson claims that 'What sets knowledge of our own minds apart from other forms of knowledge is that there is no answer to the question how we know what we think' (2001: 163). If this is true then it follows that there aren't means by which we know our own minds. So, for example, I know what I am now thinking but there is nothing recognizable as the "means" by which I know what I am now thinking. However, while there is no doubt that this puts pressure on the idea that the concept of knowledge is the

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[119] See Ayers (1991: 140) for an account of the distinction between primary and secondary knowledge.
[120] See Boghossian (2008: 152) for further discussion of the idea that knowledge, or at least ordinary empirical knowledge, is a cognitive achievement.
[121] I discuss self-knowledge in Cassam, forthcoming.

concept of a cognitive achievement it leaves intact the explanatory conception of means of knowing. This says that means of knowing are what we draw on to explain how someone knows *when an explanation is available*. It is a separate question whether an explanation *is* always available or whether, when one is available, the knower knows what it is.

Before moving on there is one more question about means of knowing that needs to be addressed. The explanatory conception says that Φ-ing that P is a means of knowing that P only if it is possible to explain how S knows that P by reference to the fact that S Φs that P. What makes 'By Φ-ing that P' a good answer to 'How does S know that P?'? One kind of minimalist says that no general account can be given of what makes an answer a good one, beyond saying that a good answer is simply one that we recognize as such. This is hard to accept. Take the proposition that the laptop on which I am writing these words is silver. I can know that it is silver by seeing that it is silver but not by hearing that it is silver (unless this means hearing from someone else that it is silver). To put it another way, 'By seeing' is a good answer to 'How does he know that his laptop is silver?'. 'By hearing' is generally a bad answer. Minimalism takes this difference to be one that cannot be explained further but this cannot be right. There is an obvious explanation of the difference: the concept *silver* is one that can ordinarily be known to apply by visual means but not by auditory means. This suggests that what counts as a means of knowing that P or a good explanation of someone's knowledge that P is fixed, at least in part, by reference to the concepts that figure in P.[122]

It is a difficult question exactly how the conceptual content of P determines what counts as a means of knowing that P. A further complication is that knowledge can be transmitted and acquired by testimony. I know that my laptop is silver because I can see it but you know that it is silver because I just told you. Are these different ways of coming to know one and the same proposition on a par? A natural thought is that seeing that my laptop is silver is a *canonical* means of knowing that it is silver. Learning that it is silver as a result of my telling you is a *bona fide* means of knowing but not a canonical means of knowing. When it comes to the shape of my laptop, sight and touch

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[122] I owe this suggestion to Christopher Peacocke.

are both canonical means of knowing. Once again, it is the nature of the concepts that figure in the proposition known that fix what counts as a canonical means of knowing.

3.   Transcendental Arguments

Suppose that a sceptically minded philosopher asks how knowledge of the external world is possible. Following McDowell's advice, we respond with a question of our own: 'Why exactly does it look to you, and why should it look to me, as if knowledge of the external world is *not* possible?' This is the answer we get: 'We humans get our knowledge of the world somehow from sense-perception but in order to know by perceptual means the truth of any proposition about the external world we first need to be able to eliminate the possibility that we are dreaming or being deceived by an evil demon. We cannot possibly eliminate these sceptical possibilities so it looks as though knowledge of the external world is not possible'.

Note that someone who argues in this way might be reluctant to conclude that they have no knowledge of the external world. They might believe that knowledge of the world *is* possible but they can't see *how* it is possible. It is no good responding to such a person by pointing out that, where P is some proposition about the external world, it is sometimes possible for us to know that P by seeing that P. Clearly, if it is possible for us to see that P then it is possible for us to know that P but what Stroud describes as the 'introduction of alternative, uneliminated possibilities' (2000b: 131) makes it look as though it isn't possible for us to see that P. The obstacle to knowing about the external world by perceptual means is, precisely, an obstacle to our ever being able to see that P, where P is a proposition about non-psychological reality.

On this account of the question 'How is knowledge of the external world possible?' there are two factors that make it look as though this kind of knowledge is not possible. To begin with, there is the idea that the elimination of the sceptic's alternative possibilities is a necessary condition for knowledge of the external world by means of the senses. Secondly, there is the claim that it is simply not possible for us to eliminate the sceptic's alternatives. This suggests two broad strategies for tackling the how-possible question:

(A)   Show that the supposed requirement on knowledge of the external world is not a genuine requirement.

(B)   Show that the supposed requirement on knowledge of the external world is one that it is possible for us to satisfy.

(A) is what I call an obstacle-dissipating response to the how-possible question. (B) is an obstacle-overcoming response. If either (A) or (B) can be made to work then we can claim to have explained how knowledge of the external world is possible.

Now compare a transcendental response to the how-possible question. There are two versions of such a response to be considered. One identifies certain *a priori* necessary conditions for knowledge of the external world. The other tries to show that knowledge of the external world is necessary for something else whose reality is not in question. I claim that neither type of response is to the point. Explaining what is necessary for knowledge of kind K does not explain how knowledge of kind K is possible. And showing that knowledge of kind K is necessary does not amount to explaining how it is possible. Suppose that, as Kant argues in his Refutation of Idealism, outer experience is necessary for inner experience, that is, for empirical self-knowledge. If we actually have inner experience it follows that we actually have outer experience but this does not explain <u>how</u>, given the factors that make it look impossible, outer experience is nonetheless possible. If we have outer experience then the supposed obstacles to its existence cannot be genuine but we still need to understand how they can be overcome or dissipated. And if we can overcome or dissipate the supposed obstacles to the existence of outer experience then there is no need for the transcendental argument of the Refutation.

The Refutation of Idealism is the focus of Ritter's comments. There is a great deal in his illuminating account of the Refutation with which I wholeheartedly agree. He rightly argues that Kant's point in the Refutation is not that we have inner experience and infer on this basis that there are outer objects. His point is rather that 'in order to comprehend one's intuitive representations as experiences in the first place one has to view them as causally dependent from external substances' (p. 13). As Ritter observes, this does not amount to a proof of the external world. From the fact that one has to *view* one's experiences as caused by external objects it does not follow that they *are* caused

by external objects. The mistaken idea that Kant is trying to combat is that our knowledge of the external world is acquired by reasoning from the premise that we have inner experience. Kant's idea is that consciousness of one's own existence is an *immediate* consciousness of things outside me. As Ritter puts it on Kant's behalf, 'there is no purely inner experience' and this means that 'there is no independent basis for a proof of the external world' (p 13). Furthermore, since the idealist's position has been disproved 'by means of a direct refutation, that is, by establishing that consciousness of external objects is immediate, the how-part has already been covered' (p. 14).

In what sense has the 'how-part' already been covered? Perhaps the idea is this: the question 'How is outer experience possible for us?' is equivalent to the question 'How is it possible for us to have perceptual knowledge of spatial objects?'. Kant's answer is: 'By being immediately conscious of such objects'. Immediate consciousness is, in other words, the *means* by which we have outer experience. Given that we have inner experience, the availability of such means is guaranteed by the argument of the Refutation. So Kant gives what I call a *means response* to the how-possible question, one that explains how outer experience is possible by specifying means by which it is possible, but a means response that is underpinned by the transcendental argument of the Refutation.

The question that now arises is this: how is immediate consciousness of objects in space possible, if immediate consciousness is the kind of thing that is supposed to yield *knowledge* of such objects? The sceptic's introduction of various alternative uneliminated possibilities makes it look as though immediate consciousness of objects is not possible, so the challenge is to explain how such immediate consciousness is possible. The Refutation is of limited use in this context. It tells us that we must be immediately conscious of objects in space but it does not tell us how such a thing is possible. It assures us that the supposed obstacles to immediate consciousness of objects in space cannot be genuine but it does not tell us how they can be overcome. Explaining how outer experience is possible is, or should be, a matter of explaining in detail how the sceptic's possibilities can be eliminated or why their elimination is not necessary for outer experience. Since the Refutation does neither of these things it cannot be said to explain how outer experience is possible. Showing that outer experience is necessary is not the same as showing how it is possible.

None of this is to say that transcendental arguments are of no use in epistemology. If the question is *whether* knowledge of the external world is possible then a transcendental argument of the kind that Kant develops in the Refutation of Idealism would be very much to the point, at least on the assumption that anti-sceptical transcendental arguments have any chance of success. My concern is not with *whether* knowledge of the external world is possible but with *how* it is possible. If we cannot understand how it is possible then that might lead us to question whether it is possible. But merely being satisfied *that* it is possible does not entitle us to conclude that we have a proper understanding of how it is possible. I contend that it is the multi-levels model, with its emphasis on means, obstacle-removal, and enabling conditions that provides the kind of illumination that those who ask how-possible questions in epistemology are, or should be, seeking.

Quassim Cassam

University of Warwick

q.cassam@warwick.ac.uk

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