

The Transcendental Circle

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Wittgenstein says the following. The difficulty in which thinking stands compares with a man in a room, from which he wants to get out. At first, he attempts to get out through the window, but it is too high for him. Then he attempts to get out through the chimney, which is too narrow for him. If he simply turned around, he would see that the door was open all along – Martin Heidegger¹

Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is a central text for the understanding of Heidegger's work as it develops in the 1920s, and especially for the understanding of *Being and Time*. It is also a key text for any inquiry into topology and the topological – and this is so even in relation to the appearance of these concepts in Heidegger and in spite of the way in which Heidegger's own apparent shift away from Kant is itself tied to the rise of topological themes as explicit elements in Heidegger's thinking. Indeed, one might argue that just as the passage through being and Time is a necessary stage on the way to the explicit topology of the later Heidegger, so is the passage through Kant's thinking of the transcendental a necessary stage on the way to any adequate thinking of topology as such. It is that stage on the way, or at least its basic direction, that is marked out here.

By Kant's own account, and in accord with Heidegger's reading, the *Critique of*

Pure Reason is a work, not of epistemology, but of ontology. Indeed, Kant claimed that ontology was itself “the science that comprises a system of all concepts and principles of understanding, but only insofar as these extend to objects given by the senses and can, therefore, be justified by experience” adding that “ontology is the porch or entry way of metaphysics proper and will be called transcendental philosophy because it contains the conditions and elements of our a priori knowledge.”² The idea that ontology and “transcendental philosophy” are one and the same is echoed by the early Heidegger, “We can also call the science of being, as critical science, *transcendental science*”,³ although Heidegger suggests that in his own appropriation of the idea of the transcendental he is taking up the idea in “its original sense and true tendency, perhaps still concealed from Kant”.⁴ Certainly the idea of the transcendental undergoes something of a transformation in Heidegger’s work as it develops during the 1920s, for there we find the transcendental tied closely, not only to ontology, but to phenomenology and to hermeneutics (and in a way that also presages later topological conceptions). In the methodological preliminaries to *Being and Time* Heidegger interweaves the notions of ontology, phenomenology, the hermeneutical and the transcendental. “Only as phenomenology” declares Heidegger “is ontology possible.”⁵ In its turn the meaning of phenomenology as a method is said to lie in interpretation so that “the *λογος* of the phenomenology of Dasein has the character of a *φαινομηνα*”⁶ while phenomenological truth is itself asserted to be identical with “*veritas transcendentalis*.”⁷ According to Heidegger transcendental truth and phenomenological truth are one and the same.

Heidegger’s hermeneutic transformation of philosophy in his work of the 1920s is

in sharp contrast with much of the preceding philosophical tradition. Yet the Heideggerian project, particularly in its early form, and especially its rethinking of the notions of ontology, phenomenology, and the transcendental, represents, in many respects, a direct continuation of the original Kantian project in the *Critique of Pure Reason* — as Heidegger himself acknowledged. Indeed, Kant's own work involved a major transformation in the very idea of philosophy; a transformation that was brought about through the idea of the transcendental as both a method for, and an object of, philosophical inquiry, and that was also characterized by the deployment of a set of topographical or geographical ideas and images.

The idea of the transcendental itself has, however, received relatively little discussion in most English-speaking philosophical literature, and the term is one that has been regarded with suspicion in many philosophical circles. Such suspicion has often centered on the idea of transcendental argument in particular,⁸ yet arguments claiming to be transcendental have been deployed by a number of philosophers from Norman Malcolm (and implicitly Wittgenstein) through to Strawson, Putnam, Davidson and Habermas. The continued appearance of such arguments, notwithstanding the amount of critical attention they have received, is itself an indication of the significance of the idea of the transcendental.

This paper will attempt to take up the issue of transcendental argument anew and from a slightly different perspective than is usually adopted — a perspective that will encompass both the Heideggerian appropriation of the transcendental as well as the original Kantian employment of the term. The main focus of discussion will be the apparent

circularity, not merely of transcendental argument, but of transcendental inquiry as such. Such circularity will be taken as presenting, not so much as a problem for the transcendental, as an indication of its essential structure, and of the nature of what Kant called "transcendental philosophy," or, more simply, ontology.

II. "*Philosophical knowledge*," according to Kant, "is the *knowledge gained by reason from concepts*".⁹ Yet not all philosophical knowledge is of quite the same kind. Transcendental knowledge, for instance, which Kant famously characterized as that which is occupied "not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is possible *a priori*"¹⁰ is arrived at through a form of reasoning that Kant saw as quite distinctive. Such knowledge is not concerned "with analytic propositions, which can be produced by mere analysis of concepts ... but with synthetic propositions, and indeed with those synthetic propositions that can be known *a priori*."¹¹ That Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is itself a work which, in an analogous sense, forms part of a 'transcendental philosophy'¹² is clear from Kant's own statement of the general problem with which the *Critique* is concerned: the problem contained in the question 'How are a priori synthetic judgments possible?'¹³ The idea of the synthetic *a priori* does not, however, merely designate the particular form of judgment that is the main focus of interest in the first *Critique* it is also part of the concept of transcendental knowledge and so can be taken as characterizing the very project of the *Critique* itself. What the *Critique* delivers is itself synthetic *a priori* knowledge, and the mode of reasoning that is employed to deliver such knowledge is a form of transcendental reasoning. It is not just that

such reasoning, and the proofs it gives rise to, is distinguished from other forms of reasoning by its concern with “the mode of our knowledge of objects ... in so far as this is possible *a priori*”, but that such reasoning also has a particular structure of its own. Thus Kant comments that:

What distinguishes the proofs of transcendental synthetic propositions from all other proofs which yield an *a priori* synthetic knowledge is that, in the case of the former, reason may not apply itself directly to the object, but must first establish the objective validity of the concepts and the possibility of their *a priori* synthesis. This rule is not made necessary merely by considerations of prudence, but is essential to the very possibility of the proofs themselves ... If I am to pass *a priori* beyond the concept of an object, I can do so only with the help of some special guidance, supplied from outside this concept... In transcendental knowledge, so long as we are concerned only with the concepts of the understanding our guide is the possibility of experience. Such proof does not show that the given concept (for instance, of that which happens) leads directly to another concept (that of cause); for such a transition would be a *saltus* which could not be justified. The proof proceeds by showing that experience itself, and therefore the object of experience, would be impossible without a connection of this kind.¹⁴

So we arrive at what most will recognize as that form of philosophical reasoning which goes by the name of ‘transcendental argument’; a form of reasoning that proceeds from the fact of experience to the necessary conditions on which the possibility of such experience rests.

Such a conception of transcendental argument, while it is in Kant expressly tied up with the idea of the synthetic *a priori* can clearly be understood in a way that need not rely on that notion nor on any possibly dubious distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments. The idea of the transcendental is the idea of that which can be understood to

ground experience – that is to explain its nature and possibility – but which can only be understood *through* experience. In turn transcendental *argument* is that method of proof which attempts to demonstrate the necessary ground of experience (at least as Kant understands matters), but which can only proceed by reference to experience itself. Such a characterization of the idea of the transcendental and of the method of argument associated with it is a fairly conventional one; it is not inaccurate, but it represents only the starting point for any inquiry into the nature of transcendental as such.

It is often pointed out that Kant himself took the transcendental to refer us back to the constituting power of transcendental subjectivity as the ground for experience and knowledge,¹⁵ and this may in turn be taken to suggest that transcendental arguments should be characterised by reference to the idea of the self-constituting subject rather than by reference to any circularity of structure. Such a reading may be seen as also supporting the widespread tendency to think of transcendental thinking as inherently given over to a form of subjectivism – in keeping with Heidegger’s later criticism of the Kantian project as well as of the Kantian elements in his own early thinking. Certainly there are times when Kant is explicit in taking the transcendental ground of experience to lie in the subject, and in presenting a view of transcendental philosophy as characterized by reference to the self-constitution of subjectivity. Thus in the *Opus Postumum*, he writes that “[t]ranscendental philosophy is the capacity of the self-determining subject to constitute itself *as given* in intuition.”¹⁶ This way of understanding transcendental philosophy is nevertheless not independent of the idea of the transcendental as concerned with the question of the possibility of experience and with the attempt to ground

experience (or knowledge) by reference to experience itself. Moreover Kant's insistence that the notion of the self-constituting subject lies at the heart of transcendental philosophy can be related directly to a conception of transcendental philosophy as concerned with the elaboration of the self-constituting structure of experience or knowledge – as concerned with the 'internal' unity (or 'internal connectedness') of experience. And in Kant this results in a tying together of the problem of the unity of experience with the problem of the unity of subjectivity.

Yet although one might acknowledge that the idea of knowledge as grounded in transcendental subjectivity is an idea to which Kant is led by a process of 'transcendental' reasoning, still, that it does lead in such a direction is not in itself sufficient to warrant the characterization of such reasoning as transcendental. Indeed, to treat transcendental philosophy as always leading back to a transcendental subject would be to identify Kant's particular view of the conclusions that must be reached by such argument with what is essential to the argument as such, and one might expect some independent reasons to be forthcoming before such an identification was even *prima facie* acceptable. Certainly there is a general tendency to characterize transcendental arguments in terms of their conclusions or supposed aims. To cite a particularly important instance, it is often taken for granted that transcendental arguments are characteristically arguments designed to refute the epistemological skeptic. So John Kekes, for example, states that "transcendental arguments are the Kantian ways of meeting the skeptical challenge."¹⁷ Transcendental arguments may well have anti-skeptical consequences, and may well, in some instances, be designed to reply to particular skeptical claims, but to take such arguments as

characterized by their anti-skeptical consequences would once again be to take those arguments as characterized by their conclusions rather than their particular structure. (It might also lead us to ignore the close connection between the transcendental project and some elements in the skeptical position itself.) In fact it is what we might call the ‘synthetic *a priori* structure of transcendental arguments and not the conclusions to which those arguments may lead — whether concerning subjectivity or skepticism — that Kant himself presents as marking such arguments off from other forms of proof.

It is, in fact, the synthetic *a priori* structure of transcendental reasoning that leads directly to a form of circularity in the transcendental project that seems to lie at the very heart of that project. Moreover it is a circularity that Kant himself seems to recognize. Of the principle that ‘every event has a cause’ Kant notes that it can be proven with ‘apodeictic certainty’, and yet, “though it needs proof, it should be entitled a principle, not a theorem, because it has the peculiar character that it makes possible the very experience which is its own ground of proof, and that in this experience it must always be presupposed.”¹⁸ Here Kant draws our attention once again to the basic structure of transcendental reasoning as a form of demonstration that aims to exhibit the basic principles on which experience must rest (principles such as ‘that every event has a cause’) and which proceeds, not through concepts alone, but through the connecting of concepts in relation to experience, that is, through a structure that is itself an instance of the synthetic *a priori* and which, in so far as it makes possible the very experience which is its own ground of proof,” is itself essentially circular.

In a discussion that addresses, not only the idea of transcendental argument in

Kant, but also transcendental reasoning in philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Quine, Rudiger Bubner takes a form of circularity that is very close to that identified by Kant, but which he addresses under the idea of 'self-referentiality', as in fact the characteristic feature of transcendental reasoning as such. Bubner writes that "knowledge which is called transcendental takes as its object, together with the general conditions of knowledge, the conditions of its own genesis and functioning."¹⁹ Bubner thus treats transcendental arguments as having an essentially self-referential structure in so far as the conditions into which they inquire are the conditions that make possible, among other things, the operation of the arguments themselves. And such self-referentiality may be seen to imply a concomitant circularity of argument, since transcendental arguments appear to presuppose in their premises what they also purport to demonstrate in their conclusions: only if the conditions at stake in a transcendental argument actually obtain can the argument proceed, yet the argument is itself directed at showing that those conditions do obtain.²⁰ Thus Jaakko Hintikka claims that in a transcendental argument "the conclusion (the possibility of certain conceptual practices) is arrived at by reasoning which itself relies on those practices. The conclusion makes possible the very argument by means of which it is established."²¹ Of course, circularity of argument, according to which the truth of the conclusion is already presupposed by the truth of the premises or the conclusion itself figures as a premise, is numbered among the informal fallacies of argument. It would seem, then, that if transcendental reasoning is essentially circular in this sense, such reasoning is also essentially flawed. In fact, that transcendental arguments beg the question that they purport to address is a common objection to such

arguments. Consequently, a large part of Stephan Körner's case against transcendental deductions is that such deductions are either impossible or else are instances of circular argument while Moltke S. Gram argues similarly that transcendental arguments are fallacious on the grounds that they already presuppose, in their premises, what they purport to demonstrate in their conclusions.²²

Neither Bubner nor Hintikka, however, nor indeed Kant himself, take the circularity of transcendental reasoning as identified by them to constitute a flaw in the structure of such reasoning (although Kant, in suggesting that principles such as 'every event has a cause' are indeed principles and not theorems, may also be taken to be suggesting a structure to transcendental reasoning that is other than that of simple deductive proof). Indeed, one might take it to be the case that the circularity according to which transcendental arguments attempt to exhibit the principles on which they themselves rest, is not a circularity in *argument* at all. It is not that the principles that make experience possible, or which 'make possible' argument itself (in the sense suggested by Bubner and Hintikka), figure as premises in the transcendental forms of argument that aim to *demonstrate* the necessity of those same principles to experience or to the possibility of argument. That certain principles are necessary is after all distinct from any demonstration or assertion of such necessity. Put another way, we may say that the 'ontological' structure on which the possibility of argument rests is distinct from the logical structure of the argument itself. In that case it would seem that the fact that transcendental arguments do indeed depend on certain underlying principles, the necessity of which they also aim to demonstrate, need not obviously imply any fallacious

circularity of argument.

This is not, however, the end of the story. One of the peculiarities of transcendental reasoning is that such reasoning is concerned with, among other things, the conditions of its own possibility — this is indeed what is captured by Bubner's designation of such reasoning as having a 'self-referential' structure. This point is exemplified in the case of Kant's own transcendental project in the *Critique of Pure Reason* where the aim of the project is to inquire into the possibility of synthetic *a priori* judgment and yet the project itself has a synthetic *a priori* structure. Consequently although the transcendental inquiry is one that aims to uncover the possibility of synthetic *a priori* judgment, which is both to establish *that* it is possible and *how* it is possible, in doing so it must also uncover its own possibility, for the possibility of the transcendental is one with the possibility of the synthetic *a priori*. Thus, if transcendental reasoning is to avoid logical circularity in its method of proceeding, it would seem that it cannot take as its starting point that synthetic *a priori* judgment is possible, for this is part of what is in question, and yet it cannot resort to any method of proceeding but a method which is itself synthetic *a priori*. It seems that the appearance of some sort of circularity is unavoidable here, although whether it is indeed a circularity that vitiates the possibility of any transcendental mode of procedure remains to be seen. Certainly the circularity at issue looks, on the face of it, to be that of a *petitio principii*, since the presupposition of the possibility of a certain sort of knowledge — that which is synthetic *a priori* — seems to be at least implicitly assumed by the inquiry into whether such knowledge is in fact possible. Moreover the charge of some such begging of the question would seem, in fact, to underlie the objection made so often against Kant,

even in his own lifetime, that what remained problematic in his work was how the Critical Philosophy could itself be possible; how could *critique* be possible?²³ The problem is clear in the very account of philosophical knowledge as “the *knowledge gained by reason from concepts*”. How can reason arrive at such knowledge, when reason is itself in question? How can reason engage in its own critique? So, while one can certainly distinguish, and rightly so, between the ontological and logical structure of argument, still the question of circularity in transcendental or critical philosophy cannot be evaded.

III. Heidegger, as I noted earlier, follows Kant in treating ontology as a transcendental project – *Being and Time*, as an explicitly ontological project, is also a transcendental undertaking. And while the problem of circularity in respect of transcendental argument as such is not raised explicitly in Heidegger’s work, the issue of circularity in respect of the ontological project is the focus for a good deal of discussion. The question that is Heidegger’s explicit focus of concern in *Being and Time* is the question of “the meaning of being”,²⁴ and that question, he argues, can only be pursued through an interrogation of the being of the particular being that is Dasein.²⁵ Indeed, in this respect Heidegger seems to follow a very similar path to Kant: both take the focus of their inquiry to be that finite being for whom, as Heidegger emphasizes, being itself can be raised as a question.²⁶ Heidegger notes, however, that his inquiry into the question of the meaning of being seems already to depend on some prior grasp of that into which inquiry is to be made. The relevant passage here is well known:

[To] work out the question of Being adequately, we must first make an entity — the inquirer — transparent

in his own Being... Is there not, however, a manifest circularity in such an undertaking? If we must first define an entity in its Being and if we want to formulate the question of being only on this basis, what is this but going in a circle? In working out our question have we not 'presupposed' something which only the answer can bring?²⁷

Heidegger explicitly considers and rejects the criticism of circularity here on the grounds that such "formal objections ... are always sterile when one is considering concrete ways of investigating. When it comes to understanding the matter at hand, they carry no weight and keep us from penetrating into the field of study"²⁸, but he then goes on to claim that in fact there is no real circularity in his procedure at all. "It is quite impossible for there to be any 'circular argument' in formulating the question about the meaning of Being" he writes "for in answering this question, the issue is not one of grounding something by such a derivation; it is rather one of laying bare the grounds for it and exhibiting them."²⁹

It might appear at first as if the 'circularity' that concerns Heidegger here is rather different from that which Kant notes or which is taken up by Bubner. Heidegger's problem is that we must already have a grasp of being before we can begin our inquiry into being, and so we already seem to presuppose that which we seek to provide in the course of the inquiry, whereas in Kant what is at issue is the way in which the transcendental inquiry is grounded. More careful consideration indicates, however, that the Heideggerian problem, and the Kantian, are actually quite closely related, if not identical. Certainly in both cases the inquiry that is to be pursued already seems to presuppose what the inquiry aims to bring forth, whether that be, as in Kant, the

fundamental principles that make experience possible, or, as in Heidegger, the structures that constitute the articulation or understanding of being.³⁰ More significantly, for both Heidegger and Kant, the very possibility of the projects in which they are engaged is itself at stake in their inquiries, even though it must be presupposed by them – here indeed is the self-referentiality identified by Bubner. Yet for Heidegger the apparent circularity that can be discerned is not peculiar to the inquiry into being or into experience. It is rather a feature of inquiry as such. This is made especially clear by the fact that Heidegger raises the same question of circularity in his discussion of art in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’. There he comments that: “What art is should be inferable from the work. What the work of art is we can come to know only from the essence of art. Anyone can easily see that we are moving in a circle.”³¹ The circularity that we find in the transcendental project thus seems to be a general feature of inquiry as such, and Heidegger says as much in *Being and Time*: “The circle” he notes “belongs to the structure of meaning.”³² It is, in fact, an instance of that more general and, for Heidegger, ontological structure, the hermeneutic circle.

Heidegger is quite explicit in taking his inquiry into the meaning of being as not merely a transcendental, but a hermeneutical project — his aim in *Being and Time* is to provide an *interpretation* of being.³³ The notion of the hermeneutical that Heidegger draws on in *Being and Time* is clearly one already established within the German philosophical tradition from Schleiermacher to Dilthey. It is often pointed out that with Heidegger the notion of the hermeneutical was transformed from a largely methodological notion, a notion tied up with the attempt to provide an account of the human or historical sciences

in a way that would give them an autonomous status in relation to the sciences of nature, to an ontological concept. Yet the idea that being-in-the-world is fundamentally interpretive, which is the claim advanced by Heidegger in *Being and Time* can be seen as a clear development out of Dilthey's view of meaning as the fundamental category in the understanding of human life. Heidegger broadens that Diltheyan insight, so that meaning becomes the fundamental category of understanding as such. *Being and Time* is itself an attempt to arrive at an understanding of being that is couched in terms of an inquiry into the *meaning* of being, and as such aims to provide an interpretation, a 'laying out', of the structure of being-in-the-world. And while in Heidegger's later writings there is a significant turn away from meaning towards truth, still the hermeneutical remains a characteristic feature of Heidegger's thinking.³⁴

Heidegger characterizes meaning as "that wherein the intelligibility of something maintains itself."³⁵ He takes meaning in this sense to be established through the anticipatory character of interpretation according to which something comes into view — is able to be grasped — only on the basis of what is already presupposed. Thus, in so far as the central question of *Being and Time* concerns the meaning of being, that question can be seen to be directed at uncovering that 'wherein' the intelligibility of Being maintains itself: "if we are inquiring about the meaning of Being, our investigation does not then become a 'deep' one [tiefsinnig], nor does it puzzle out what stands behind Being. It asks about Being itself in so far as Being enters into the intelligibility of Dasein".³⁶ The uncovering of this 'wherein' is precisely a matter of uncovering the fundamental prepositional or anticipatory structures ('fore-structures') on the basis of which being is

understood — which is to say that it is a matter of uncovering the fundamental structures that make possible any such uncovering at all.

The transcendental ‘circularity’ or self-referentiality that Bubner identifies as a feature of transcendental argument, and which Kant also notes, seems closely related to the ontological-hermeneutic circularity that Heidegger takes as a characteristic feature of his own transcendental project and as part of the structure of meaning itself. Of course, while hermeneutic circularity is a feature of any inquiry, in so far as inquiry always requires that it have some prior conception of its object, such circularity is not generally problematic. It is not a problem for the inquiry into art, for instance, that we must already have some preliminary conception of art before we can begin the task of inquiring into it. Without such a starting point inquiry would not even be possible. Moreover, the starting point is itself always open to revision — thus our final view about the nature of art may be such as to overturn our original assumptions — and while our initial assumptions may indeed provide a starting point and direction for our inquiry, those assumptions need not figure, in any untoward fashion, in any ‘proof’ of the conclusions we might reach. In all cases, in fact, inquiry follows a structure very much like that which Heidegger speaks of as a “remarkable relatedness backwards and forwards” in which our presuppositions about the object of inquiry enable the encounter with that object, but in which the encounter may itself lead to the modification of our presuppositions.

The fact that inquiry may possess a necessarily prepositional structure does not imply that inquiry involves any necessary circularity of argument. To resort to the distinction used in the previous section, the idea of circularity may be one way of

capturing the ontological structure of inquiry or of understanding, but this need imply no logical circularity. Yet as was also noted previously, there is reason to suppose that matters are rather different when it comes to the idea of transcendental inquiry — when it comes to the idea of an inquiry into the very possibility of understanding, experience, or inquiry itself. What is at stake in such an inquiry (and this is both what makes the inquiry transcendental as well as problematic) is the very possibility of the inquiry itself, not merely how such an inquiry is possible, but that it is possible at all. Consequently, the transcendental inquiry must presuppose its own possibility, while at the same time it attempts to inquire into that possibility, even to demonstrate it, and in this respect it seems that such inquiry does indeed involve the sort of logical circularity that constitutes a begging of the question at issue.

Yet having recognized some form of circularity here, having identified it as an instance of a more general circularity of understanding³⁷ and himself having raised the issue of a possible circularity in argument, Heidegger's solution to the apparent problem is to deny that the transcendental-ontological project is a matter of "grounding something by ... a derivation." Instead it is, he says, a matter "of laying bare the grounds ... and exhibiting them,"³⁸ and later he comments that "[w]e cannot ever avoid a 'circular' proof in the existential analytic, because such an analytic does not do *any* proving *at all* by the rules of the logic of consistency."³⁹ Rather than take this latter comment as a confession of inconsistency, it seems that it should rather be understood as simply a denial that the transcendental project is a project that aims to deliver *proofs*. Immediately, of course, we need to be careful. For Kant himself talks of transcendental proofs and the idea of

transcendental argument seems well-established. Surely the transcendental project is concerned with proofs of some kind?

In Section 43(a) of *Being and Time* Heidegger discusses the question “of whether there is a world at all and whether its Being can be proved.”⁴⁰ Such a question, says Heidegger, “makes no sense if it is raised by Dasein as Being-in-the-world; and who else would raise it?”, and he goes on to argue for a basic confusion in any attempt to ‘prove’ the reality of the world — even in Kant’s ‘Refutation of Idealism.’ The demand for a proof of the external world can only arise, according to Heidegger, from an inadequate understanding of Dasein and its relation to the world. “If Dasein is understood correctly” says Heidegger, “it defies such proofs, because, in its Being, it already is what subsequent proofs deem necessary to demonstrate for it.”⁴¹ Here, Heidegger connects the impossibility of proof with the same sort of circularity we have already noted as a feature of the transcendental project. The attempt to prove Dasein as being-in-the-world is doomed to failure since Dasein must already be-in-the-world before such a proof can be attempted. Being-in-the-world is already given with any attempted proof of such being. Equally it is already given with any attempted disproof. Thus: “A skeptic can no more be refuted than the Being of truth can be proved. And if any skeptic of the kind who denies the truth, factually is, he does *not* even *need* to be refuted.”⁴²

The transcendental-ontological project is essentially concerned with ‘laying out’ a structure that is already present in our being the kinds of beings we are; that is already present in the possibility of experience. It does not and cannot ‘prove’ such a structure in any unconditional sense, because the articulation of that structure must itself make

essential reference to being as already given; to experience as already presented. Taking Heidegger as a clue to understanding Kant here, we can now see why, in Kant's specification of the nature of the transcendental, transcendental reasoning is understood as operating only with reference to experience and its possibility. It does not operate independently of experience even though it is precisely experience that is in question, for it is concerned to provide precisely a 'laying-out' of the structure within which experience is possible – an articulation of that anticipatory 'fore-structure' by which meaning is established – rather than the derivation of that structure from something independent of it. It is indeed properly concerned with 'principles' rather than 'theorems'. And if transcendental argument does not provide any 'unconditional' proof of its conclusions, neither should we imagine that some form of conditional' proof can be attempted. The transcendental project does not take the nature of experience or being or meaning as the 'condition' on the basis of which the existence of certain formal principles or structures is deduced; for part of what is at stake in such a project is the very nature of experience, the very meaning of being, the very possibility even of inquiry itself.

The denial that the transcendental project aims at the production of a 'proof' or logical demonstration, and the associated denial of the possibility of or the need for a refutation of skepticism, follows directly from Heidegger's own hermeneutical understanding of ontology and the transcendental. The project of understanding, conceived from a hermeneutic standpoint, is not itself primarily concerned with derivation or proof (though this may well form part of the overall project), but rather with the articulation of a unitary structure within which particular elements can be located and

so related to one another and to the whole. Derivation or proof may be possible on the basis of such an overall interpretation, and deductive procedures may even be employed in arriving at that interpretation, but the interpretation is not as such an axiomatic or deductive structure. Thus as Gadamer points out "the objection raised from a logical point of view against talk of a 'hermeneutic circle' fails to recognize that this concept makes no claim to scientific proof, but presents a logical metaphor, known to rhetoric ever since Schleiermacher."⁴³ An interpretation attempts to exhibit the underlying unity (or the lack of such unity) of that which it interprets. In so doing, one might say, it is also involved in providing an account of the meaning of its object. Thus, the critic who attempts to 'interpret' some dramatic or literary work is concerned to provide us with a view of the work as a whole which thereby enables us to integrate the different elements within the work and so 'make sense of' those elements; the field linguist who constructs a translation manual for a foreign tongue is similarly concerned to provide a unitary structure into which the various linguistic elements that may be encountered (or have been encountered already) can be integrated and their meanings assigned. In such cases the interpretations that are offered are not proved or logically deduced from some prior set of conditions. Such interpretations are justified only in terms of the extent to which they do indeed enable a unified understanding of particular elements, or, as we might also say, to the extent that the various elements are indeed rendered in an intelligible fashion. In Heidegger the hermeneutic characterization of understanding comes to be seen as descriptive, not merely of understanding within the 'human' or 'moral' sciences, but of ontological-philosophical understanding as such. The transcendental-

hermeneutical task of philosophy is to achieve an articulation of that unified structure that is the ground for the possibility of experience, knowledge or being- in-the-world. And such articulation can only be achieved from within that which it also grounds — it aims, not at ‘proof’ in the usual sense, but a unified understanding of the whole.⁴⁴

IV. Of course, the denial that transcendental arguments are properly understood as aiming at just a strict deductive proof of their conclusions, should not be taken to imply that such arguments eschew standard modes of reasoning. As was briefly noted above, transcendental inquiry, along with interpretation in general, does indeed make appeal to principles of reasoning and argument that are no different from those that are appealed to in other contexts. Moreover one might treat the interpretive articulation of a particular structure as itself a form of demonstration or proof of that structure or its elements. None of this is denied. The claim that transcendental arguments do not aim at ‘proof’ or ‘derivation’ involves essentially the rejection of any mode of proceeding that looks to establish some foundation for experience in something that lies outside of the experiential — that looks to derive the structure of experience from that which lies outside of it. Transcendental inquiry looks instead to establish a grounding for experience (to locate an ‘origin’) in the integral unity of experience and to provide an articulation of that very unity. If such articulation is understood to consist in the identification and elaboration of certain basic principles (as in Kant) then the validity of those principles is established only by reference to their operation within the particular structure of which they are part. Thus it is not a matter of demonstrating that the principles in question, or some set of

propositions that embody those principles, correspond to or are derivable from some independent structure; the principles that are fundamental to experience derive their grounding only by reference *to* experience and *not* by reference to anything *outside* of experience.

This feature of transcendental argument seems, however, to have given rise to a common objection to transcendental reasoning – an objection that once again may be taken to provide an instance of the recurrent theme of circularity – to the effect that such reasoning is implicitly verificationist.⁴⁵ If the primary aim of transcendental argument is seen, as most often it is, to be the refutation of skepticism, then it may appear that such refutation can only be accomplished by conflating two distinct claims: that the possibility of experience or knowledge requires certain propositions to be *held* true and that those same propositions *are* true. The latter claim is required for the refutation of skepticism, but the former, so it is argued, is the most that a transcendental argument can legitimately provide. Only the addition of a verificationist premise that denied the distinction at stake here, and that tied truth and meaning to the constraints of experience or knowledge, would allow anything further to be achieved. But the assumption of such a premise would effectively beg the question against the skeptic, since it would be to already assume the truth of certain fundamental beliefs or principles when the truth of those beliefs or principles is precisely what the skeptic would cast in doubt.⁴⁶ At this point the charge of verificationism turns out, once again, to return us to the problem of circularity.

Now it should already be evident that the charge of verificationism here, and the charge of circularity along with it, must depend on something of a misreading of the

character of transcendental argument, and, perhaps also, a misunderstanding of what is at stake in such arguments. The claim that transcendental arguments conflate what is a requirement of experience with what is true independently of experience depends on the assumption that such arguments are indeed concerned with what is true independently of experience itself, and to which experience may or may not correspond. But if transcendental inquiry is concerned to lay out the structure of experience, then such inquiry should not be taken as committed to claims about any realm beyond experience or about the relation between experience and such realms — transcendental inquiry is addressed to the structure of experience, for it is indeed experience and its possibility (its origin and unity) that is in question — and what else, one might ask, could legitimately be in question here?

In fact, the feature of transcendental argument that is at issue corresponds directly to an important feature of hermeneutic practice. In reading some text, good interpretive procedure would counsel us against trying to try to assess the truth or falsity of claims about matters internal to that text by looking outside of it. Whether we are interested in some aspect of Lear's relationship to Cordelia or the overall interpretative framework within which the events in *King Lear* should be set, those questions can only be answered by looking to the actual text of the play itself. Outside of the text such questions simply lack meaning. More generally, indeed, in attempting to decide between interpretations of a text there is nothing to appeal to outside of the text *as interpreted*. Similarly, where what is at issue is a question concerning the nature of experience, there is nothing to appeal to beyond experience as it actually presents itself. Even the Kantian distinction between

things as they appear and things as they are in themselves does not provide us with a way of understanding objects other than as subject to concepts. Insofar as objects are objects they are constituted according to the rules of the understanding; insofar as experience is experience it is constituted with a certain unitary structure. We may try to imagine things as they might be independently of our experience of them, but such imaginings do not undermine our understanding of things *as experienced*. Moreover, only by looking to experience itself can we begin to understand the nature of experience, there is thus no 'outside' to experience that must be taken account of in the understanding of experience itself. Similarly, in the case of Lear, even though we find many clues as to how to read the play outside the text — in historical events for instance — it is the reality of the text itself, and not something outside of it, to which any interpretation must be addressed.

This emphasis on the character of transcendental reasoning as operating always and only with respect to the intrinsic structure of experience rather than anything independent of it need not be taken as an example of commitment to any verificationist principle. Rather it directs our attention to the way in which interpretation, and the claims that may express an interpretation or follow from it, always depend on certain preconditions, such that in the absence of those preconditions, not only may there cease to be any interpretation to consider, but there may no longer be anything to interpret. Transcendental arguments exemplify this interpretive structure — a structure that has often been misidentified as verificationist. Yet insofar as this understanding of the transcendental commits it to a concern only with the structure of experience or being-in-the-world, and sets aside any concern with what may lie beyond it (assuming that

sense can indeed be attached to such a notion), does this not mean that transcendental argument cannot address what is really most at issue for us here — the nature of the world and the truth of our beliefs — and that transcendental argument is precluded from being able to make any sort of reply to the one who would raise doubts in respect of these issues, namely the skeptic?⁴⁷

Certainly, it is a mistake to treat transcendental arguments as solely or even primarily concerned to refute skepticism, for this almost inevitably leads to a mistaken understanding of such arguments. Yet it cannot be entirely correct to say that transcendental reasoning has no relevance to the problem of skepticism. Although the transcendental project is committed to an approach that is in full agreement with the skeptic who denies that there is any possibility of an independent grounding for experience, the transcendental project is also committed to an approach that denies that such independent grounding is really what is at issue. To understand why this is so we need first to recognize that the questions that concern us here — questions of truth and falsity — and to which skepticism is, at least in part, a response, are questions that arise within experience and with reference to experience. To demand that such questions be answered independently of experience and by reference to something outside of it is already to have misunderstood the nature of those very questions. It is thus that so many responses to skepticism consist in a denial that the skeptical position is coherent. Of course, in one sense skepticism is a perfectly coherent position — we can certainly wonder whether our current experience of things is not illusory or mistaken in all manner of important respects — but in another, perhaps more important, sense it rests on an

approach that is indeed incoherent. In this latter sense skepticism, at least in many of its more common forms, fails to understand the manner in which even our questioning of experience remains such that it can only be addressed from within the realm of experience itself.

Transcendental inquiry operates always from within experience and by appeal to experience. It does not and cannot move to ground the fundamental principles or structures it uncovers independently of experience, knowledge or being-in-the-world. Neither is there any independent or presuppositionless starting point for such inquiry. In this respect, as I noted above, transcendental inquiry exhibits a 'circularity' identical to the circularity of interpretation. Just as interpretation always presupposes some 'prepositional' starting point – the mere fact of having identified something as amenable to interpretation is already to have presupposed much about that object – so too is the interpretation which aims to bring to light the basic structures of experience, knowledge, or being-in-the-world always an interpretation which operates with respect to some preliminary understanding of things. Transcendental inquiry is thus no different from any other form of interpretative engagement. It does not aim to move from a presuppositionless beginning, but rather, from within the circle of our judgments and pre-judgments, to offer an integrated account of the particular realm in question and to establish the unity of that realm – just as any more mundane interpretive project attempts the same with respect to its own object, whether be it be a text, a set of visual images, an array of sounds, a set of movements or the realm of ordinary experience as such. What is at issue is precisely the structure of, for instance, experience, but this is not

conditional on the prior given-ness of experience, nor does it take experience to provide some neutral starting point for inquiry.

The manner in which transcendental arguments proceed is always by showing the way in which the unity of a particular realm, whether characterized in terms of experience, knowledge, or some other notion, depends on the systematic inter-relation of the basic elements within it; elements which, in their own turn, are constituted through their interconnection with other elements. Thus Kant can say that transcendental ‘proofs’ aim to ground experience – and to ground it in certain basic principles – and yet the grounding is achieved only by appeal to experience. The process of providing grounds here is thus one that looks to a set of interconnected elements or principles as necessary for experience to be possible, while those elements are themselves grounded by reference to their combined role in the constitution of the overall unity of experience. Thus there is a relation of mutual support between the overall structure and its elements, and between the elements themselves insofar as any particular element or principle is grounded only by means of its relation to all of the others, that is, to the structure as a whole. The grounding that is thereby achieved is not a matter of relating one set of elements (‘that which is grounded’) to another set (‘that which grounds’) but of demonstrating the integrity, that is the ‘original unity,’ of a set of elements such that together they form a single structure.⁴⁸

In so far as the transcendental project aims at exhibiting the integrity of that into which it inquires — experience or being-in-the-world — so the problem of demonstrating the *possibility* of experience comes to be one with the problem of demonstrating the unity

of experience. The possibility of experience, and of any particular experience, is itself seen to reside in the unitary character of experience. To provide an articulation of that unity is to provide a demonstration of the possibility of experience. Of course, if we cling to the idea that the transcendental project is concerned to 'prove' such unity and possibility, then this will appear incomprehensible. Only if we grasp the project as involving something like an 'interpretation' will it begin to make sense, for in interpretation it is precisely the integration of elements within a structure — whether within a text, a performance, an array of sounds or set of actions — that is at issue. Moreover, in so far as this integrity is indeed exhibited and articulated so too does the demonstration of unity and of possibility come together with a demonstration, in Kantian terms, of the origin of our right to the concepts we employ. That right is seen to derive precisely from the integral involvement of those concepts in the overall structure that both unifies and makes possible.

In Heidegger this emphasis on the transcendental project as concerned with an articulation of the original unity of experience is connected directly with the idea of circularity of argument. In his 1935-36 lectures on Kant, published in English as *What is a Thing?*, Heidegger explicitly refers to Kant's own recognition of circularity in his manner of proceeding.⁴⁹ In relation to such circularity Heidegger comments:

The unity of thought and intuition is itself the essence of experience. The proof [of the principles] consists in showing that the principles of pure understanding are possible through that which they themselves make possible, through the nature of experience. This is an obvious circle, and indeed a necessary one. The principles are proved by recourse to that whose arising they make possible, because these propositions are

to bring to light nothing else than this circularity itself; for this constitutes the essence of experience...

Experience is in itself a circular happening through which what lies within the circle becomes exposed (*eröffnet*). This open (*Offene*), however, is nothing other than the between (*Zwischen*) – between us and the thing.⁵⁰

The circularity of the transcendental project is thus not accidental to it, nor does it represent a flaw in its manner of proceeding. Instead, the circularity of the transcendental is itself indicative of the fundamental unity of experience – in Heidegger's account, the open – that is the primary focus for transcendental inquiry as such. The point is not to eliminate or cover over such circularity, but rather to bring it to light.

Once we appreciate the identity of the task of establishing the possibility of experience with the task of establishing the unity of experience, we can begin to see why Kant might have been led to emphasise the centrality of transcendental subjectivity in understanding the nature and possibility of experience or of knowledge. The unity of experience, in which the ground for the possibility of experience also rests, is grounded in the transcendental unity of apperception. The requisite unity here can only be a unity that is in one sense 'internal to' experience (in the same sense as that in which understanding is always 'internal to' the circle of interpretations), rather than imposed on experience from without – it is a matter, as I have expressed it here, of the *integrity* of experience. If the unity of experience is indeed an 'internal' unity then it can only be given to experience by itself. In other words, the unity of experience, in which the possibility of experience rests, is a unity that consists in a certain self-reflexive integration. It is clear how we might easily be led, at this point, to a notion of self-constituting transcendental subjectivity as

the 'ground' for the unity of experience (and how too we might be led to misunderstand the exact nature of such a subjective grounding) – so whereas in Heidegger we may take the motif of circularity to refer us to the idea of the 'open' that lies between us and the thing, in Kant we may take it to refer us to the structure of subjectivity itself.

Yet if we follow the line that leads via the transcendental to the idea of the unity of subjectivity, still we do not immediately (if at all) arrive at a conception of the subject as a simple, irreducible ground for experience that is independent of it. Kant does not rule out such a possibility, but within the framework of the transcendental project the unity that is at issue is not imposed onto experiential content by an independent subject – that would be contrary to the need to understand the unity of experience as integral to experience – instead the subject constitutes itself and experience in the same act (or activity) of unification. At this point the circularity of the transcendental project itself does indeed come to be embodied in the circularity of the self-constituting subject. And so one may well come to regard the transcendental as characterized precisely by its focus on such self-constitution – which is just the view to be found in Hintikka. The idea of self-constitution that is implicated here seems, moreover, to be an increasingly important element in Kant's philosophy through the second and third *Critiques* (it is surely central to the notion of reflexivity and to the idea of the autonomy of reason) and into the *Opus Postumum*. and so is undoubtedly a significant element in Kant's own understanding of his project. But in so far as the idea of the self-constituting subject is indeed important, so it also gives rise to questions about the very nature of the subjectivity that it invokes. Just what this self-constituting 'transcendental' subject might be remains a difficult if central

question of Kantian exegesis.⁵¹

V. Transcendental-ontological inquiry can indeed be seen as characterized by a certain ‘circularity,’ but it is not the circularity of a *petitio principii*, so much as the circularity that may be found in any inquiry that aims, from within a particular domain, to arrive at an account of that domain in its entirety. The circularity here is not unlike the circularity of method that may characterize the task of the cartographer forced to map out a new region on the basis of nothing more than her own sense of location and orientation, building up a view of the region on the basis of repeated observations, triangulations and comparisons from within the region itself.⁵²

If the transcendental project is properly one that aims at mapping out a region or describing the structure of a particular realm, then it must be said that the region or realm in question is one with which we are all, in some sense, intimately acquainted. In the language of *Being and Time*, it the region of our own being-in-the-world that is at issue. In this respect the idea of circularity can also be taken to convey the way in which the transcendental-ontological project addresses itself precisely to that with which, in one sense at least, we should already be familiar.⁵³ Indeed, in this respect, the transcendental-ontological project can be seen, in Heideggerian terms, as forcing upon us a recognition of the way in which our being-in-the-world is something into which we are already thrown: the world – or experience – is something in which we are already entangled. There is no possibility of ‘deducing’ or ‘proving’ such entanglement; but we can hope to understand the way in which we stand within it and the way in which such entanglement is

constitutive of what we ourselves are. (Hence any inquiry into this realm can *only* be transcendental in its approach.) In this respect transcendental-ontological inquiry is inquiry into that which is already 'apparent' (here again is an echo of Heidegger's 'phenomenological' understanding of ontology), and in which such inquiry is itself grounded.

Heidegger comments in *Being and Time* that: "What common sense wishes to eliminate in avoiding the 'circle', on the supposition that it is measuring up to the loftiest rigor of scientific investigation, is nothing less than the basic structure of care"⁵⁴ – that is, our being already ahead of ourselves *in* the world, engaged *with* the world. And insofar as philosophy tries to understand the world in terms of some presuppositionless ground – in terms only of what Heidegger calls the present-at-hand – so it seeks to understand the world in a way severed from such engagement. But it is precisely this structure of engagement – of care – that is at issue. It is this structure that is the basic concern of the transcendental project itself, and while it is a structure of engagement with which we are, in at least one sense, already familiar, it is also that which is most difficult to bring to light – a structure that we are always in danger of overlooking or forgetting. Thus, the transcendental project can itself be construed, not merely as a project concerned with the structure of care, but as a project concerned primarily to remember. As Heidegger writes:

The finitude of Dasein — the understanding of Being — *lies in forgetfulness*. This [forgetfulness] is nothing accidental and temporary, but on the contrary is necessarily and constantly formed. All fundamental-ontological constructions which take aim at the unveiling of the inner possibility of the understanding of Being must, in projecting, wrest the forgetfulness away from what is apprehended in the projecting. The

basic fundamental-ontological act of the Metaphysics of Dasein as the laying of the ground for metaphysics is hence a “remembering again”.⁵⁵

Insofar as ontology, understood as a transcendental project, becomes an act of remembrance, so it does not aim to bring forth anything new, but to return us to what was, and is, already before us — to return us to the world that is the inevitable starting point for all our deliberations.

Notes and references

¹ Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, trans. Charles H. Seibert (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p.17.

² What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolf?, trans. Ted Humphrey (New York: Abaris Books, 1983), p.53.

³ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* trans, Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p.17.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Being and Time, trans John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), H35.

⁶ Ibid., H37.

⁷ Ibid., H38.

⁸ Indeed Stephan Körner identifies “Kant’s principal mistake” as consisting in “his conception of, and attempts at, transcendental deductions in his theoretical and practical philosophy,” Körner, ‘Transcendental Tendencies in Recent Philosophy’, *Journal of Philosophy* 63 (1966), p.551.

⁹ *Critique of Pure Reason* A713/B741.

¹⁰ Ibid., A11-12/B25.

¹¹ Ibid., A718/B746.

¹² One should be wary of taking the *Critique of Pure Reason* to be a piece of transcendental philosophy in any unqualified sense for the simple reason that in the *Critique* Kant denied that the work constitutes such a philosophy. As he writes: “Transcendental philosophy is only the

idea of a science, for which the critique of pure reason has to lay down the complete architectonic plan... if this critique is not itself to be entitled a transcendental philosophy, it is solely because to be a complete system it would also have to contain an exhaustive analysis of the whole of a priori human knowledge ... The critique of pure reason therefore will contain all that is essential in transcendental philosophy. While it is the complete idea of transcendental philosophy, it is not equivalent to that latter science, for it carries the analysis only so far as is requisite for the complete examination of knowledge which is a priori and synthetic.” (A13-14/B27-28). Elsewhere Kant is somewhat less cautious, characterizing transcendental philosophy as “the doctrine of all *a priori* knowledge in general, which the *Critique of Pure Reason* is” (*What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolf?* p.77).

¹³ *Critique of Pure Reason*, B19. Synthetic *a priori* judgments are, to put it briefly, judgments that combine intuitions and yet do so on the basis of principles that are not themselves given in intuition.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, A782-783/B810-811; see also A737/B765.

¹⁵ See especially Jaakko Hintikka, ‘Transcendental Arguments: Genuine and Spurious’, *Nous* 6 (1972), pp.274-281. Hintikka takes the Kantian position to stand directly within the so-called ‘maker’s knowledge’ tradition and so to exemplify and develop the idea “that we can have certain especially valuable kinds of knowledge of what we have ourselves brought about, and of such things only.”

¹⁶ *Opus Postumum* trans. Eckart Förster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.254 AK 21:93.

¹⁷ ‘The Scandal of Philosophy’, *International Journal of Philosophy* 12 (1972), p.512.

¹⁸ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A737/ B765.

¹⁹ ‘Kant, Transcendental Arguments and the Problem of Deduction’, *Review of Metaphysics*, 28 (1975), p.462.

²⁰ The dependence between a transcendental argument and the principle or principles it aims to demonstrate may be indirect, as in the case of the principle of causality where the dependence will most likely go through some notion of knowledge or experience, or direct, as is the case with, for instance, a principle of rationality. Of course, this dependence will not apply merely to arguments designed to prove such principles. If a principle is indeed a transcendental principle of the sort in question then it will be presupposed by all and every argument, including both arguments that purport to prove and those that purport to *disprove* such principles. This means that transcendental arguments may, in some cases, take the form of *reductio* proofs that show

how certain attempts to dispense with those principles nevertheless rely upon them. This seems to be part of Stephan Körner's concept of transcendental deduction, see 'The Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions', *The Monist* 51 (1967), pp.317-331, and is an idea also taken up in Rorty's idea of transcendental arguments as always '*ad hominem*', see Rorty 'Transcendental Arguments, Self-Reference and Pragmatism', in P. Bieri, R.-P. Horstmann and L. Kruger (eds.), *Transcendental Arguments and Science* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979), pp.77-103.

²¹ Jaakko Hintikka, 'Transcendental Arguments: Genuine and Spurious', p.278.

²² Gram, 'Must Transcendental Arguments be Spurious?', *Kant-Studien* 65 (1974), p.304, and Körner, 'The Impossibility of Transcendental Deduction'. I will not discuss the details of Gram's or Körner's arguments here. Indeed I take the charge of circularity that both bring forth, albeit in different forms, to be answered largely through the analysis of transcendental circularity offered in the following pages – an analysis that shows the way in which such circularity is intrinsic to the transcendental project while not being destructive of it. In respect of Körner, however, a few points are worth noting. First, Körner's discussion is somewhat complicated by his adoption of a very particular characterization of the nature of transcendental deduction as concerned to achieve a demonstration of the necessary uniqueness of some set of concepts in enabling the "differentiation" of a "region of experience." While Kant does treat the task of the Transcendental Deduction as concerning our 'right' to certain concepts, this concern with right is only obliquely captured in terms of a concern with establishing the uniqueness of some conceptual scheme. In addition, the Kantian project may well be misunderstood if it is assumed to depend on an absolute distinction between the conceptual and the empirical. As should be immediately evident from the centrality of the notion of the synthetic *a priori* and as will become clearer in the discussion below, the problem of the transcendental-ontological project concerns the *unity* of experience or knowledge. That task cannot be undertaken merely through the examination of some conceptual scheme, but only through consideration of the relation between concepts as they function as elements within the structure of experience itself. For a more detailed discussion of Körner's position see my, 'Transcendental Arguments and Conceptual Schemes: A Reconsideration of Körner's Uniqueness Argument', *Kant-Studien* 81 (1990), pp.232-251.

²³ See Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), especially pp.6-7, 39, 226-27, 321.

²⁴ See, for instance, *Being and Time* H1.

²⁵ See *ibid.*, H7, H11-H15.

²⁶ The idea of *finitude* as a common focus here is taken up explicitly by Heidegger in the early

sections of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* pp. 14ff.

²⁷ *Being and Time*, H7. See also H152-53 & H315.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, H7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, H7-8.

³⁰ There may well be a very close parallel between the Heideggerian inquiry into the ‘fore-structures’ of our understanding of being and the Kantian inquiry into the conditions for the possibility of knowledge. Dieter Henrich points out that, for Kant, reflection precedes investigation and that “reflection always takes place ... we always know ... about our cognitive activities and about the principles and rules they depend upon” (‘Kant’s Notion of a Deduction and the Methodological Background of the First Critique’, in Eckart Förster (ed.), *Kant’s Transcendental Deductions* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989], p.42). Henrich argues that the Transcendental Deduction can only operate insofar as it provides an explicit articulation of what is already grasped in reflection, thus “investigation is preceded by, and made possible through, reflection, by which the multidimensional system of our cognitive capacities is accessible to us, persistently and prephilosophically” (p.43).

³¹ ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p.18.

³² *Being and Time* H154; see more generally H148-151.

³³ See especially *Being and Time* §32, H148-153.

³⁴ In his discussion of the hermeneutical in ‘A Dialogue on Language’, Heidegger points to the fact that in his later writings he “no longer employs the term ‘hermeneutics’” (p.12). Yet although this shift is far from being an arbitrary one, and Heidegger explains what lies behind the shift in the course of the dialogue, it also remains clear that in a deeper sense the shift does not at all entail an abandonment of that which Heidegger attempted to name in his use of the term ‘hermeneutics’. The dialogue also contains a brief discussion of the hermeneutic circle. Heidegger’s partner in the dialogue (the dialogue is presented as one between ‘a Japanese and an Inquirer’) comments that “It seems to me that now we are moving in a circle. A dialogue from language must be called for from out of language’s reality. How can it do so, without first entering into a hearing that at once reaches that reality?” Heidegger replies that “I once called this strange relation the hermeneutic circle”, but adds that the “necessary acceptance of the hermeneutic circle does not mean that the notion of the accepted circle gives us an originary experience of the hermeneutic relation ... the talk of a circle always remains superficial... I would avoid a presentation [of the hermeneutic circle today] as resolutely as I would avoid speaking about language” (‘A Dialogue on Language’, p.51). If I have returned to talk of

circularity, this is not only because I have tended to focus my discussion on the earlier Heidegger of *Being and Time*, but also because the motif of circularity, superficial though it may be, nevertheless indicates a fundamental feature of the sort of inquiry in which Heidegger was himself engaged throughout his career, and which can also be discerned elsewhere in the philosophical tradition — if not always pursued as radically as it is in Heidegger. On the sense in which hermeneutics remains a central element throughout Heidegger's thinking see Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, "Way and method: hermeneutic phenomenology in thinking the history of being", in Christopher Macann (ed), *Heidegger: Critical Assessments* vol. I (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.310-129.

³⁵ *Being and Time*, H151.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ See *ibid.*, H152-53.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, H7-8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, H315

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, H202.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, H205.

⁴² *Ibid.*, H229.

⁴³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. rev. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1992, 2nd, rev. edn.), p.266, n.187.

⁴⁴ See Gadamer, *Truth and Method* pp.265-271. This hermeneutical characterization of transcendental-ontological inquiry, and the Heideggerian denial that such inquiry is aimed at proof, may remind us of Kant's own presentation of the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a 'deduction' only in the legal sense of the term (*Critique of Pure Reason* A84-85/B116-117). Kant's use of the legal metaphor here can indeed be seen as another way of approaching the issue of what Heidegger treats in terms of the interpretive character of the transcendental project and of emphasizing once again the idea that the transcendental is concerned with establishing, not a series of demonstrative deductive proofs or proof, but the integrity or unity of a particular realm. For more on this aspect of the Deduction see Dieter Henrich, 'Kant's Notion of a Deduction and the Methodological Background of the First Critique', pp.29-46.

⁴⁵ The claim that transcendental arguments are indeed verificationist seems to have achieved quite widespread acceptance. Thus Mark Okrent writes of transcendental arguments that "as has often been pointed out ... all such arguments, from Kant to Peter Strawson, are essentially verificationist" (Okrent, *Heidegger's Pragmatism* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988], p.6),

allowing the claim to stand without further argument.

- ⁴⁶This account of the verificationist charge is along similar lines to that developed by Barry Stroud in ‘Transcendental Arguments’, *Journal of Philosophy* 65 (1968), pp.241-256. Stroud’s original argument is directed less against Kant and more specifically against Strawson and Shoemaker. In *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp.128-169, Stroud provides a more specific and detailed discussion of the Kantian response to skepticism in particular and while he does not there treat the Kantian position as explicitly verificationist, he clearly sees it as having much in common with the avowedly verificationist approach to be found in Carnap and elsewhere.
- ⁴⁷Charles Taylor concludes, on similar grounds to those outlined here, that this is indeed the case, and that transcendental arguments are unable to show that skepticism is false – see Taylor, ‘The Validity of Transcendental Arguments’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 79 (1978-79).
- ⁴⁸This structure seems very close to the structure Heidegger refers to in *Being and Time* as ‘equiprimordiality’ (see especially H132) and to which Dieter Henrich draws attention in ‘On the Unity of Subjectivity’, pp.48-54 (in Henrich, *The Unity of Reason* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994]; the paper was originally published as ‘Über die Einheit der Subjektivität,’ *Philosophische Rundschau* 3 [1955], pp.28-69). Henrich takes Heidegger’s commitment to the notion of equiprimordiality (a notion he correctly sees as central to the project of *Being and Time*) to be important in giving rise to Heidegger’s forced reading of Kant in the *Kantbuch*. But the role that the notion of equiprimordiality plays in Heidegger’s Kant-interpretation is also dependent on certain other Heideggerian assumptions – particularly on Heidegger’s own conception of the history of ontology and the location he gives to Kant within that history. And, Henrich’s criticism notwithstanding, it seems the notion of equiprimordiality can be read as closely related to the hermeneutical conception of the transcendental itself and that, in certain respects, it can also be seen as having an important relation to Kant’s own conception of the transcendental project.
- ⁴⁹Heidegger cites the passage from A737/B765 quoted above: “it makes possible the very experience which is its own ground of proof” (*What is a Thing?* p.242).
- ⁵⁰*What is a Thing?*, trans. W. B. Barton Jr. and Vera Deutsch (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1967), pp.241-242; see also pp.223-224.
- ⁵¹Some of the issues relating to this question are further discussed in my ‘The Nature of Cognitive Connection: Kant and Davidson on the Unity of Consciousness’.
- ⁵²This cartographic metaphor seems to be adumbrated in Kant in comments such as that which appears in Chapter Three of the ‘Analytic of Principles’. There he describes his achievement in

the first part of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in explicitly cartographic terms: we have ... explored the territory ... carefully surveyed every part of it ... measured its extent, and assigned to everything in it its rightful place” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A235/B294). A similar theme reappears, though more explicitly, in Heidegger’s presentation of his own project as involving a ‘topology’ of being and his repeated use, particularly in his later writing, of topographic metaphors.

⁵³In another sense it is that which is most strange — see Heidegger’s discussion of the ‘uncanny’ (*unheimlich*) in *Being and Time*, H188-190, H276-279. Gadamer, of course, has also emphasised the way in which the hermeneutical is itself always placed in the interplay between familiarity and strangeness. Thus, he comments that “Hermeneutic work is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness; but this polarity is not to be regarded psychologically but truly hermeneutically — i.e., in regard to what has been said: the language in which the text addresses us, the story that it tells us. Here too there is a tension. It is in the play between the text’s strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between*” (*Truth and Method* p.295). The ‘in-between’ Gadamer here invokes may remind us of that other ‘between’ of which Heidegger speaks in *What is a Thing?* pp.241-242.

⁵⁴*Being and Time*, H315.

⁵⁵*Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p.159.