

TRANSCENDENTAL METHOD

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Introduction

Kant's transcendental enquiry is called transcendental philosophy. The main objective of transcendental philosophy is to establish a *a priori* knowledge about the world. But the question is why did Kant search for this type of knowledge? It can be said that some knowledge can be dubitable. Kant wanted to discover such knowledge which is indubitable. This anxiety leads him into an enquiry of *a priori* knowledge about the world. To do this, Kant took the help of the transcendental method. The term 'transcendental' refers to some basic features. Kant explained these features by introducing two prominent terms, namely 'transcendent' and 'transcendental'. Many Kantian scholars also deal with the term *transcendental*. We also describe how scholars like John P. Doyle and Andrew Brook understood Kant's views on *transcendental*. Kant's *transcendental* method is the result of his *transcendental* argument. Kant's epistemology is based on his *transcendental* argument. In this essay, our purpose is to explain how Kant applied the transcendental argument for the study of human cognition.

The Meaning of the term *Transcendental*

Doyle argues that the term 'transcendental' is not Kant's coinage. In this regard, he cites the views of Hans Leisegang. "Transcendental", says Leisegang, "was one of those terms which Kant borrowed from the vocabulary of earlier philosophy and then changed for his own purposes." (p. 784). Kant applied a special status to the term. In his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Kant uses the term *transcendental* as a pure faculty for having a *a priori* cognition. In this context, he stated that "The word transcendental... with me never means a reference of our knowledge to things, but only to the cognitive faculty" (*Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, p. 294). On the other hand, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, he distinguishes between the terms 'transcendent' and 'transcendental'.

The distinction between the terms 'transcendent' and 'transcendental'

The origin of the above terms is the same. In both cases the word 'transcendent' is common. But their meanings are different. Kant applies these two terms for serving two different meanings. About 'transcendent', Kant says,

We shall entitle the principles whose application is confined entirely within the limits of possible experience, *immanent*; and those, on the other hand, which profess to pass beyond these limits, *transcendent*' (B352). On the contrary, in the context of *transcendental* Kant mentions that, 'that is, employment extending beyond the limits of experience (CPR, B353).

From the above argument, it can be suggested that the meaning of *transcendent* and *transcendental* is clear. Kant described the term *transcendent* as meaning 'is beyond experience'. On the other hand, he applies the term *transcendental* as meaning 'the precondition of human experience'. It is concerned with the applicability of pure concepts of understanding. Concerning this meaning, it can be said that Kant's *transcendental* is the second step of his transcendent in human experience. This is also regarded as a method in Kant's study of philosophy. This is called the transcendental method.

Kant's Doctrine of *Transcendental* Method

Just like the other methods such as the method of analysis, Kant's *transcendental* method plays an important role in his cognitive study. A proper study needs a proper method. Kant himself did not use the term 'transcendental method' in his book. Some Kantian scholars namely Andrew Brook, Sami Philstrum have used the term Kant's *transcendental* method. Andrew Brook has mentioned of Kant's transcendental method in his article named 'Kant and Cognitive Science'. In this paper, he has shown how cognitive scientists have been influenced by Kant's *transcendental* method. Brook says cognitive scientists have regarded Kant's method as the fundamental method for the study of human cognition. Like Kant, he claims that they were looking for the pre-condition of human experience. In this respect, it should be mentioned that in every field, whether in philosophy or science, a method is nothing but some set of presuppositions based on which it is possible to reach to a certain conclusion about the study. Here it should be mentioned that Kant's *transcendental* argument is regarded as his *transcendental* method. There is no difference between the transcendental method and the transcendental argument.

What is Transcendental Argument?

Kant's transcendental argument is the greatest discovery in his study of cognition. Kant developed this argument to study human thought, experience, and knowledge. But Kant does not define this argument anywhere in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. He has explained *transcendental* argument as the mode of deciphering the necessary conditions of human experience. Besides Kant, many philosophers like

Ralph C. S. Walker have worked on the *transcendental* argument. However, they have not given any definition of this argument either. But they use some premises to express the nature of Kant's transcendental argument. They have given a structure of this argument. Walker says that "Transcendental arguments are concerned with the conditions under which experience, experience of a given sort, is possible" (*Kant, the Argument of Philosophers*, p. 18). Now the question arises, how did Kant apply transcendental argument to understand human cognition?

Application of Transcendental Argument to Human Cognition

Kant mentioned two transcendental arguments. The first argument is concerned with David Hume's scepticism. This is also called as transcendental deduction and the second part of this argument deals with scepticism about general objects which is termed by Kant as the refutation of idealism. We will explain both kinds of transcendental arguments in detail. First we would like to deal with the sceptic's challenge.

Meeting the Sceptic's Challenge

Hume doubted in the certainty of human experience. Here it is important to note that, Kant was well aware of the possibility of doubt regarding pure concepts of the understanding. It is because of the nature of the human reason which transcended its entire limit. In this regard, Kant argues that,

... a scandal to philosophy and to human reason in general that the existence of things outside us (from which we derive the whole material of knowledge, even for our inner sense) must be accepted merely on faith, and that if anyone thinks good to doubt their existence, we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof (CPR Bx1).

Hume is an example of the above argument. According to Hume, experience alone can give knowledge; one need not accept the role of the concept. He thought so because the relation of concept cannot be empirically justified to an object. In this regard, Hume mentions the theory of 'law of association'. Through this law, Hume says, we experience an object after repeated observation. But for this task, we need not have any *a priori* concept. This becomes a difficult problem for Kant. It can be said that, as Kant applied categories as the pre-condition of human experience, they must be free from any doubt. If categories itself remain doubtful, if they do not have any objective validity then the experience which we will have through the help of categories again would be a matter of doubt. Barry Stroud, a contemporary Kantian

scholar, mentions the possibility of doubt about the object in general, or it can be said experience in general. In this regard, he claims that,

You cannot show the sceptic that you are not hallucinating, and hence that you know there is a tomato on the table, simply by asking your wife if she sees it too - hallucinations of your wife's reassuring words are epistemologically no better off than hallucinations of tomatoes. At every point in the attempted justification of a knowledge claim, the sceptic will always have another question yet to be answered, another relevant possibility yet to be dismissed, and so he cannot be answered directly. (p.242)

Because of these reasons, Kant tries to justify the validity of the categories through the method of his deduction.

Deduction

The Dictionary meaning of the term 'deduction' is 'a definite conclusion about something'. Kant applied another special status to the word. He tried to prove the objective validity of the pure concept of understanding through the help of deduction. Kant distinguished between two different types of deduction, namely, empirical deduction and transcendental deduction. Kant made this distinction following his two different types of concepts - empirical concepts and pure concepts. Empirical concepts are those general concepts which we can get through our experience, for example, the concept of a table, chair etc.

Kant mentions two different types of *a priori* concepts, *apriori* concept of sensibility and *apriori* concept of understanding. Space and time are *apriori* concepts of sensibility and categories are the pure concepts of understanding. Empirical concepts are related to empirical deduction and pure concepts are related to the transcendental deduction. These two different types of deductions are about the object of the phenomena which is also called by Kant as appearance. These are also made based on the mode of knowing of the appearance. In this regard, Kant says,

The explanation of the manner in which concepts can thus relate *a priori* to objects I entitle *transcendental* deduction; and from it I distinguish empirical deduction, which shows the manner in which a concept is acquired through experience and through reflection upon experience, and which therefore concerns, not its legitimacy, but only its de facto mode of origination. (A84, CPR).

From the above, it is clear that the title of these two different types of deductions is based on the relation of the *a priori* concepts to the object. Now it can be said that space and time as *apriori* concepts of sensibility and the categories as *apriori* concepts of the understanding always relate themselves to an object in an

apriori manner. That is why Kant called them transcendental deduction. Kant distinguished empirical deduction from the transcendental deduction. But he did not give any example of empirical deduction. As empirical deduction does not contain the object *apriori*, Kant did not give much importance to the empirical deduction. But he emphasises transcendental deduction which can fill up the gap in epistemology made by scepticism.

Transcendental Deduction

Kant used transcendental deduction as a tool for justification of categories. Kant claims that we acquire knowledge through the application of pure concepts of the understanding. Deduction of the categories lies on some principle. In this context, Kant has given some argument which can be regarded as the main point of this deduction. This is, the *transcendental* deduction of all *a priori* concepts has thus a principle according to which the whole enquiry must be directed namely, that they must be recognised as *a priori* conditions of the possibility of experience, whether of the intuition which is to be met with in it or of the thought. Concepts which yield the objective ground of the possibility of experience are for this very reason necessary. But the unfolding of the experience wherein they are encountered is not their deduction; it is only their illustration. For on any such exposition they would be merely accidental. Save through their original relation to possible experience, in which all objects of knowledge are found, their relation to any one object would be quite incomprehensible (CPR, A94). Let us see how Kant has applied the pure concept of understanding as to the possible condition of experience.

Pure Concept as the Necessary Condition of Human Experience

Kant claims that we acquire knowledge of an object through representation. It means we cannot have direct knowledge of any object. What we have at first in our experience are only representations. Then through a certain process and by satisfying certain condition, representation converts itself into the object of knowledge. Here the question arises, what is the process through which representation turns into an object of knowledge? Kant tries to solve this problem by posing questions from both sides regarding the role of these two different modes of knowledge. In this context, he claims that 'Either the objects alone must make the representation possible or the representation alone must make the object possible' (B125/A93, CPR).

The first part of the above sentence, Kant argues, is directed towards the truth which is merely *empirical* and cannot be *a priori*. On the other hand, in the second case, Kant says that representation itself cannot be the cause of the production of an object of possible experience. It is because Kant believed that since representations are not *apriori*, they are not sufficient to know an object. Hence there are other possible sources for knowing. These are pure concepts of the understanding using which we can think of an object. In this regard, he says,

The objective validity of the categories as *a priori* concepts rests, therefore, on the fact, that so far as the form of thought is concerned, through them alone does experience become possible. They relate of necessity and *a priori* to objects of experience, for the reason that only by means of them can any object whatever of experience be thought. (B126/A93, CPR)

Thus, Kant has proved that concepts are the *a priori* condition for having our thought. As thought is possible, we can also know objects through these pure concepts. Kant says that through the help of pure concepts, we can even think of the object of the *noumenal* world although we cannot know of them. Kant was unable to establish the objective validity of categories. He justifies categories by showing that our thought is impossible without them. Before doing that, Kant would need to prove how the thought of categories is itself possible. But Kant did not do that because, to do that, he would have had to think of another presupposition as the precondition to prove the objective validity of categories. But it will create an infinite series of problem. Hence Kant avoids that route.

Another problem is that when Kant thinks of categories as the pre-condition of human experience he does not make clear what type of experience is implied. Is it *apriori* or *aposteriori*? This question is raised because Kant's categories are *apriori*. Then it is natural to think that categories would be the condition of knowledge which is *apriori*. But if Kant applies them as the condition of experience in general, then it becomes obscure by nature. Kant discussed the second *transcendental* argument in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This argument is called 'refutation of idealism'.

Refutation of Idealism

Idealists are concerned with inner experience. According to them, only mind or ideas exists. About this claim, they have denied the objective validity of outer objects. In this section, we seek to focus on how Kant has refuted idealism and

established the reality of objects outside us. Kant was concerned with two different types of idealism, namely, the *problematic* idealism of Rene Descartes and *dogmatic* idealism of Bishop Berkeley. The main theme of this argument is to find out the mistakes of the view of that idealism which rejected the existence of external objects in space. Kant did not accept idealism. Kant believed in the existence of external objects in space and time. For this reason, Kant developed a *transcendental* method to establish the objective validity of the external object from within the subjective condition.

Dogmatic Idealism of Berkeley

Berkeley is regarded as a dogmatic idealist in the history of philosophy. His view is called dogmatism because he thought his beliefs were true and realism was false. He claims that only the mind and its ideas are real. He did not accept the existence of space. If space itself is impossible, then it is also impossible to have the existence of an object in space. That is why Berkeley also denied the real existence of an object in space. He argues that we infer outer objects based on the ideas of our mind. In this regard, Kant mentions Berkeley's view where it is said that

‘... Space, with all the things of which it is the inseparable condition, is something which is in itself impossible; and he therefore regards the things in space as merely imaginary entities’ (CPR, B275)

Kant did not explain space as a relation of different objects like Newton and Leibnitz did. Rather he understands space as a form of intuition. But from the above quotation of Berkeley where it is said ‘in space,’ it can be said that Berkeley imagined space as the container which contains objects in it.

Kant has argued against the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley because whereas Kant has placed an overall emphasis on space and time as the condition of human experience, Berkeley has rejected space as fully imaginative. In this regard, Kant argues that Berkeley's claim of ‘the things in space as merely imaginary entities’ would have been true if it would have been the case that space is the property of things-in-themselves. But Kant did not explain space as the property of things-in-themselves. In this respect, Kant says, ‘Dogmatic idealism is unavoidable, if space be interpreted as a property that must belong to things in themselves. For in that case space, and everything to which it serves as condition, is a non-entity’ (CPR, P. 244).

In the transcendental aesthetic¹, Kant shows the importance of space for having cognition. He regards to space and time as *a priori* forms of sensibility. According to Kant, whatever object we experience, we experience it in space. Kant regards space as *a priori* because it is not an empirical concept. For this reason, he says,

Space is *a priori* representation, which underlies all outer intuitions. We can never represent to ourselves the absence of space, though we can quite well think of it as empty of objects. It must therefore be regarded as the condition of the possibility of appearances, and not as a determination dependent upon them (CPR, P. 68).

Kant did not explain the exact nature of the space. As Kant did not explain space based on the relation of the objects, why did Kant use the term ‘space’ to represent the form of intuition? There is no clear description of this problem in CPR. Kant used the concept of space and time in his writing but he did not give any deep explanation about them. This is a gap in Kant.

Problematic Idealism of Descartes

Kant argues that Descartes’ idealism is easier to understand than that of the idealism of Berkeley. Descartes did not deny the existence of external objects. Kant thought so because he says, according to Descartes; the objects of the outer world can be dubitable. It means these are not as certain as the statement ‘I am’. But Kant claims that ‘even our inner experience, which for Descartes is indubitable, is possible only on the assumption of outer experience’ (CPR, P. 244).

Kant mentions two different types of senses - outer sense and inner sense. They have their tasks. Outer sense gives us outer knowledge and inner sense helps to get knowledge about inner sense. Their task cannot be reversed. These senses can be regarded as two different windows using which we can observe the nature of two different worlds. In the context of outer sense, Kant says, ‘By means of outer sense, a property of our mind, we represent to ourselves objects as outside us, and all without exception in space. In space, their shape, magnitude, and relation to one another are determined or determinable’ (CPR, P. 67). On the other hand, about inner sense, he says,

Inner sense by means of which the mind intuits itself or its inner state, yields indeed no intuition of the soul itself as an object; but there is nevertheless a determinate form [namely, time] in which alone the intuition

¹ As he already has shown the importance of space in human experience in the section of transcendental aesthetic, he did not mention it in the section on the refutation of idealism.

of inner state is possible, and everything which belongs to inner determinations is therefore represented in relations of time (CPR, P. 67).

Idealism assumed that only the immediate experience is an inner experience and that from it we can only *infer* outer things. (CPR, B277).

But Kant has proved that they are wrong in their opinion. In this respect, I would like to mention how Kant has explained the possibility of cognition of outer objects. Kant says,

I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. All determination of time presupposes something *permanent* in perception. This permanent cannot, however, be something in me, since it is only through this permanent that my existence in time can itself be determined (CPR, B276).

What is 'Permanent' in Kant?

Permanent means something is there outside us based on which we can even know ourselves. However, Kant holds that, ...perception of this permanent is possible only through a thing outside me and not through the mere representation of a thing outside me and consequently the determination of my existence in time is possible only through the existence of actual things which I perceive outside me (CPR, 276).

Kant's permanent refers to the states of affairs of the object in space which is fixed. Moreover, states of affairs are not possible if there would not be any real object in space. From this, it is suggested that Kant admitted the possibility of experience about the world by presupposing the permanent existence of objects apart from us. Hence our outer experience is about only those objects which do not belong to us.

In contrast to the idealists' view, Kant holds that not only is the existence of the outer object accepted by our inner experience, but he says even our inner experience is determined by outer experience. As evidence for his view, Kant claims that 'The determination of my existence in time is possible only through the existence of actual thing which I perceive outside me' (CPR, B276). I agree with Kant that there is the existence of objects outside us. But how is it possible to understand my existence based on the existence of the object outside us? Kant did not give a clear explanation of this. But when Descartes says that 'I think therefore I am' it can be said that we can understand our existence based on the thought of the object of the outer world. It is so because our thoughts always have content. This content is nothing but the representation of the object outside us.

Kant accepted the real existence of the outer objects independently of our mind. This independent object is called things-in-themselves according to Kant. In

this domain, Kant took a realist position. But he claims that the representations of the outer object cannot have any independent existence apart from our mind. In this area, Kant stands in an idealist position. Kant named his idealism as transcendental idealism. Kant has given his theory of transcendental idealism to solve the problem of cosmological dialectic. Kant understood that to have proper knowledge, both sense and reason are required. As a result, he gave the theory of sensibility and understanding. These two theories solved the entire problem raised by empiricism and rationalism in the realm of epistemology. Similarly, Kant took the position of both realism and idealism. But Kant is not an idealist like Berkeley and Descartes according to whom the objects of the outer world may be doubtful or a mere inference. In this respect, Kant says,

Our transcendental idealism, on the contrary, admits the reality of objects of outer intuition, as intuited in space, and of all changes in time, as represented by inner sense. For since space is a form of that intuition which we entitle outer, and since without the object in space there would be no empirical representation whatsoever, we can and must regard the extended beings in it as real; and the same is true of time. But this space and this time, and with them all appearances, are not in themselves things; they are nothing but representations, and cannot exist outside our mind. (CPR, B520)

It can be said in conclusion that Kant's *transcendental* method based on his transcendental argument is suitable to solve the epistemological problem in philosophy. In this relation, I wish to mention that in many cases, we have seen that Kant's argument was concerned with some critical problems like the problem of scepticism regarding the possibility of knowledge and it tried to solve it. It also faced another crucial problem, namely, idealism. Kant tried to solve this problem. He dealt with two different idealisms namely idealism of Descartes and the Idealism of Berkeley. He made clear the meaning of these two different idealisms and tried to solve the basic problem raised in idealism. This is the prominent part of Kant's transcendental argument.

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