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THE SENSE OF THE TRANSCENDENTAL IN KANT AND IN HUSSERL

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Unlike Kant's practical philosophy and aesthetics that still enjoy a wide popularity, two Kantian topics that belong to his transcendental philosophy have become favourite targets of manifold attacks as out-dated and archaic, especially during the 20th century: the concept of the "transcendental" and the role of the "I think". Yet, a century and a half later Husserl salvaged both of these concepts in their essential core, and — against the tide of his time — dealt with them anew, for he considered them revolutionary and unprecedented in history. Husserl's phenomenological method profoundly differed from Kant's constructive methodology — albeit his transcendental turn was also inspired by it — enabling him to overcome many of the controversial aspects of Kant's interpretation. Thanks to Husserl's retrieval, both concepts survived the implacable judgment of history and are currently being seriously reconsidered, in ever increasing measure, as relevant for philosophy. Although both topics are intertwined and should be dealt with jointly, this article is only concerned with some aspects that are central to the "meaning of the transcendental". First, as it has been introduced by Kant, and second, as it has been retrieved by Husserl in its essential core, broadening its reach far beyond the merely "speculative" or "theoretical" level to which Kant confines it, in order to encompass the whole field of lived human experiences (theoretical, practical, or evaluative), as well as in cultural and scientific endeavours.

Key words: Transcendental, Husserl, Kant, a priori, conditions of possibility, cognition, experience.

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СМЫСЛ ПОНЯТИЯ «ТРАНСЦЕНДЕНТАЛЬНОЕ» У КАНТА И ГУССЕРЛЯ

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В противоположность кантовским практической философии и эстетике, до сих пор пользующимся широкой популярностью, две принадлежащие трансцендентальной философии Канта темы стали, в особенности в XX в., излюбленными мишенями для нападок как устаревшие и архаические: понятие «трансцендентальное» и роль «я мыслю». Спустя полтора столетия, вопреки общему движению своего времени, Гуссерль вновь восстановил эти революционные и не имеющие прецедента понятия в их существенных правах. Несмотря на то, что трансцендентальный поворот Гуссерля был вдохновлен Кантом, феноменологический метод Гуссерля отличался от конструктивной методологии Канта, что позволило ему преодолеть многие спорные аспекты кантовской интерпретации. Благодаря усилиям Гуссерля, оба понятия выдержали суровый суд истории и в настоящее время играют важную роль в философии. Хотя обе темы тесно связаны друг с другом и должны рассматриваться исключительно в их единстве, в представленной статье в центре внимания оказываются центральные для «значения трансцендентального» аспекты. Во-первых, речь идет об аспекте, представленном у Канта; во-вторых, об аспекте, восстановленном Гуссерлем в его сущностном смысле, что позволило расширить сферу влияния указанного понятия за пределы «спекулятивного» и «теоретического» уровня, которым его ограничил Кант, с целью охватить совокупную область жизненного опыта (теоретического, практического и оценочного) как в повседневной жизни, так и культурных и научных устремлениях.

Ключевые слова: Трансцендентальное, Гуссерль, Кант, а priori, условия возможности, познание, опыт.

1. CERTAIN UNPOPULAR AND BADGERED KANTIAN CONCEPTS

Those Kantian topics that currently enjoy a wide popularity chiefly concern morals, aesthetics, and perhaps even theology. Less popular are those issues related to science, scientific knowledge, and transcendental philosophy (or metaphysics “in a new sense”), issues that he deals with in his 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant, 1974).

Assuredly, this is wholly justified, for despite the fact that Kant amends and polishes his *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1787, he is convinced ever since its first 1781 edition of having “definitely resolved” the epistemological or speculative problems related to science and knowledge. Thus from that moment on he immerses himself in the examination of problems that had always been for him much more relevant — those

regarding the “highest ends” and “ultimate interests” of reason, i.e., “the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God” (Kant, 1974, A 798/B 826).

Indeed, towards the end of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, in a section entitled “The Canon of Pure Reason”, Kant points out that reason’s interest is not merely “speculative” (Kant, 1974, A 797/B 825), but also has a “practical” interest. This can be expressed in “the following three questions: 1) *What can I know?*, 2) *What should I do?*, 3) *What may I hope?*”, whereby the first question is merely speculative, the second is practical (Kant, 1974, A 804–805/B 832–833) — for it concerns “*what is to be done* if the will is free, if there is a God, and if there is a future world” (Kant, 1974, A 899/B 828) — and the third is “simultaneously practical and theoretical,” for ultimately “all hope concerns happiness” (Kant, 1974, A 805/B 833). Consequently, during the last twenty years of his life Kant puts most of his philosophical efforts into dealing with the latter two questions concerning practical or moral problems and “eschatological” problems, namely, those related to the ultimate end of human existence. During the past hundred years, these final efforts of Kant’s philosophical thinking have awakened more interest among academics, and square better with what can be qualified as “the current validity” of Kant’s thought.

But let us see what Kant says about what “speculative reason” offers with regard to those highest interests. He acknowledges that what “speculative reason,” in its transcendental use, is able to offer those interests “is very little” (Kant, 1974, A 798/B 826), for both human understanding and existence are essentially *finite*. He does admit that human beings have a “natural propensity” or yearning to *know* much more than they can actually cognize; such a propensity is indeed anchored in our *nature*, but it is a propensity that we cannot fully *satisfy* by means of our speculative or theoretical knowledge. Yet for Kant, the *speculative interest* does play a relevant role in spite of these limitations. This is precisely what he attempts to develop, in the most complete and systematic way possible, in his first (1781 and 1787) *Critique*. The task is then to establish *which* human faculties intervene in knowledge, *how they work* correctly (what are the “conditions of possibility” of their use), what are their incorrect uses, and finally, what the “limits” of knowledge are.

Kant is clear that our *speculative knowledge* is incapable of satisfying, resolving, or giving an answer to reason’s highest questions and ultimate ends. In his view, *nothing in experience* — to which the speculative or theoretical use of reason is tied — can give us a definite *answer* regarding these questions¹.

¹ “If, then, these three cardinal propositions are not at all necessary for our *knowing*, and yet are insistently recommended to us by our reason, their importance must really concern only the *practical*” (Kant, 1974, A 799–800/B 827–828).

The reason for this limitation, finitude, or imperfection of our “theoretical or speculative reason” is that scientific knowledge or experience is inexorably tied to the condition of *time*. The introduction of “time” at the centre of his reflections on science was, in my view, one of Kant’s greatest contribution to 18th century philosophy, and the introduction of this concept has been of immense and far-reaching relevance in the history of philosophy and culture. Indeed, in spite of the fact that Kant considers “scientific knowledge” — concretely, Isaac Newton’s work in the field of physics — to be the most important intellectual conquest and the most solid scientific product of his time, making use of and grounded upon apodictic, universal, and necessary knowledge, he does not share the conviction of his modern rationalist predecessors whereby science is built from the viewpoint of God, upon a *fundamentum absolutum et inconcussum* and *sub specie aeternitatis*. Instead, Kant considers that science is built *sub specie temporis*, i.e., from the entirely *finite* viewpoint of human beings moored in time. And since time is a universal and necessary condition bound to our sensibility, science is inexorably tied to, and submits to, what sensible experience may offer. If science attempts to develop itself without any regard to this temporal condition, essential to our sensibility, its discourse remains empty and becomes entangled in dialectical arguments.

The only thing that “speculative reason” is able to offer in this context, according to Kant, is a “*regulative use*” in psychology, cosmology, and theology, i.e., by bestowing *unity* on the scientific judgments of those sciences and *directing their course* towards and around the guiding ideas of soul, world, and God as infinite goals. Indeed, the *regulative use* of theoretical reason allows the deployment of cognitions drawn from “empirical psychology” (Kant, 1974, A 848/B 876) “*as if*” beyond the “phenomena of the inner sense” (or psychic phenomena) — phenomena that we apprehend by means of our inner temporal experience — there were something like a *soul* to which these phenomena adhere or belong, and, furthermore, a soul that is immortal (Kant, 1974, A 683–684/B 711–712). Moreover, such regulative use of theoretical reason also enables the development of physical knowledge “*as if*” the ensemble of scientific judgments referring to spatiotemporal nature (or to the “phenomena of the outer sense”) were wholly ordered according to “condition-conditioned” relationships, in conformity with the “idea,” principle, or rule of an “unconditioned whole” termed “world”, and, within those “condition-conditioned” relations, “*as if*” those natural phenomena were wholly governed by the “law of causality” (Kant, 1974, A 684–685/B 712–713). Kant remarks in passing that this regulative idea of “world” under the deterministic law of natural causality does not contradict the possibility that we may simultaneously acknowledge human *freedom* as a type of “cause” that — at the same time that it acts

in coordination with *natural* causes and their *natural* effects — is “not caused” itself, namely, that there may be *freedom*, which is an “unconditioned” or uncaused cause (not itself determined by other empirical causes). Finally, the *regulative use* of theoretical reason enables the unfurling of both empirical psychology and physics “as if” every phenomena of the universe *in general* (psychic and/or physical) were harmoniously governed by a higher, divine, creative, and providential intellect (Kant, 1974, A 685–688 / B 714–716).

Briefly, according to Kant, the “*regulative use*” of speculative reason should not be interpreted as a “*constitutive use*”, as if our speculative reason could indeed give us factual information about these “ideas” or “unconditioned wholes” — about the immortality of the *soul*; about the unity of the *world* according to its condition-conditioned relations; and about *God* as “the highest intelligence, [...] the cause of everything according to the wisest aim” (Kant, 1974, A 688/B 716). In sum, for Kant the “ideas of reason” are not *objects* of knowledge; instead, all three of them — soul, world, and God — are merely “ideas of reason” in accordance with ends.

Thus beyond historical or empirical knowledge and beyond the rational knowledge of mathematics, “philosophy” for Kant — or metaphysics in a “wide” or “future” sense — strives to develop itself as a “system of pure reason”. This system includes a *practical* part — termed “metaphysics of morals”, focused on the realm of the “ought” (what *should be*) — and a *speculative* part (a “metaphysics of nature”), whose central *locus* is occupied by “*transcendental philosophy*”². Consequently, *transcendental philosophy* as part of the “metaphysics of nature” is focused on the study of the *a priori* (universal and necessary) rational conditions that render possible the scientific knowledge of the *objects of nature* (psychology and physics), knowledge that is nevertheless organized and oriented according to “hyperphysical ideas” or “ideas of reason” that transcend experience (Kant, 1974, A 845–847/B 873–875). It has been my purpose on other occasions to suggest the current relevance of two Kantian topics that belong to his “*transcendental philosophy*”, notwithstanding their having scarcely been recognized in general by contemporary philosophers and having instead been favourite targets of manifold attacks and explicit distancing — especially during the 20th century (Lerner, 2012, 2015). Here I am referring to the concept of the “*transcendental*” and to the role of the “I think”, or in Kant’s terms, of “*transcendental apperception*”. Manifestly, both topics are intertwined and should be dealt with jointly, precisely because they do not seem to enjoy any relevance in current philosophical reflections and are frequently singled out as out-dated and archaic. All sorts of critical

² See in general “The architectonic of pure reason” (Kant, 1974, A 832–851/B 860–879).

interpretations and arguments have been woven and devised against “transcendental philosophies” — allegedly idealistic and solipsistic — and against “philosophies of the subject”, many based on misunderstandings that have their origin in modern times, especially regarding the philosophies of Descartes and Kant.

Notwithstanding my belief, on this occasion I will focus on the sense of the “transcendental”. The essential role of the centralized “I” — from the passive, unconscious, instinctive level all the way up to the active, conscious, and responsible stratum of the “life of the *subject*” (beyond merely the “life of the *mind*”) — has been the topic of very strong arguments devised by Husserl after his transcendental turn. These arguments are currently being further developed (Zahavi, 2005; Zahavi, 2014; Siderits, Thompson, Zahavi, 2011; Gallagher, Zahavi, 2012).

Now despite Edmund Husserl’s admission, a century and a half later, that in Kant’s original reflections on the transcendental sphere and the “I think” there remain several problems that have also been addressed by other contemporary philosophers, he did consider that both were revolutionary concepts unprecedented in history and of tremendous scope, so that it was worthwhile to keep probing into their meaning and contents. As a consequence, he did salvage those concepts and dealt with them by means of the “phenomenological method”, modifying Kant’s methodology albeit inspired by it. The phenomenological method enabled him to reveal and describe those concepts in their full potential, swimming upstream against innumerable critiques that, curiously, emanated from many of his own disciples or followers, who reproached him for making use of outmoded concepts that it would have been better to consign to oblivion. Thus, thanks to Husserl’s retrieval of both Kantian concepts, they survived the implacable judgment of history and today are being seriously considered, in ever increasing measure, as relevant for our times.

My contribution thus only concerns some aspects that are central to the “meaning of the transcendental”: first, as it has been introduced by Kant, and second, as it has been retrieved by Husserl in its essential core. Indeed, Husserl broadens its reach far beyond the merely “speculative” or “theoretical” level to which Kant confines it, in order to encompass the whole field of human lived experiences (theoretical, practical, or evaluative) in daily life, as well as in cultural and scientific endeavours. I will neither dwell further on the synthetic and constitutive role of the “I think” in the construction of scientific knowledge within Kant’s transcendental project, nor on its role in the constitution of the sense and validity of every being, value, or norm in general according to Husserl’s phenomenology. If these analyses were undertaken, we would also have to focus on the “paradox of subjectivity” that Kant first detects and highlights and that Husserl also revives and explicitly deals with. According to this

paradox, subjectivity may be considered *in the world* as an *empirical* entity alongside other worldly entities, but it can also be considered as a *transcendental* “functioning,” “achieving” subjectivity that is directed at the world and is *responsible* for endowing it with unity, meaning, and validity (Husserl, 1954, 185 ff.; Carr, 1999). As should be clear by now, the fulfilment of the theoretical-practical interests of reason demands that one connect both topics, for the “I think” — as “transcendental” — is the sole subjectivity *responsible* for our theoretical, practical, and evaluative “position-takings” in general.

2. THE SENSE OF THE “TRANSCENDENTAL” IN KANT

Let us start with Kant and examine the global sense that this concept has in his philosophy, as well as some of its limitations.

“Transcendental” has not always had the sense that Kant finally gives it. Formerly, medieval philosophers talked about “transcendental categories” expressed by “divine names” (*transcendentalia*). This type of “categories” is more original and universal than the categories of “substance” and “accidents” that Aristotle introduces in the first book of his *Organon* — *The Categories* — to refer to how real natural entities exist and are cognized. For Aristotle, first philosophy must study the principles and causes of “being”, and “being” exists in nature primarily under the form of individual (or primary) substances, bearers of accidents such as quality, quantity, the relative, place, time, position, state, action, or passion (Aristotle, 1973, 1b25–2a10). Medieval philosophers and theologians thus give the name “transcendental” to other higher categories — coextensive and mutually interchangeable — such as *being* or *thing*, *unity*, *something*, *truth*, and *goodness* (*ens* or *res*, *unum*, *aliquid*, *verum*, and *bonum*, which are sometimes summarized as *the One*, *the Good*, and *the True*. The *transcendentalia* — inspired by Plato’s characterization of the Idea of the Good that crowns the τόπος ουρανός (*beauty*, *goodness*, and *truth* — καλόν, ἀγαθόν, and ἀληθές) — may be predicated not only of all created entities, but analogically and eminently (as Thomas Aquinas states) of God as “divine attributes” (Aquinas, 1968; Aquinas, 1970–1976, Q.1 A. 1). Since medieval times, then, these supreme categories that refer to divine attributes are called *transcendentalia* or “transcendentals”. This meaning was still in use in Kant’s lifetime, transmitted by the rationalist school of Wolff and Baumgarten in which Kant was schooled. Kant himself keeps using the term “transcendental” related to “transcendent” — as opposed to the natural “immanent” realm and its finite experience — up to and including various parts of his 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason*

(possibly the oldest parts), which he began writing around 1772 (Smith, 1984, 73 ff.)³. Thus the first sense of the term “transcendental” that Kant inherits through Martin Knutzen’s school from its ancient, metaphysical use is that which lies “beyond” all possible human experience, namely, that which traditionally pertained instead to an archetypical or divine being.

But Kant also slowly develops a broadened meaning of the term to include properly *human* activity, although once again it is a matter of a human realm that is situated “beyond” what the sciences (such as physics and mathematics) are able to get hold of, i.e., beyond “possible experience”. This human domain, where the term transcendental does indeed have a use, is precisely the realm of “philosophy”; hence Kant indicates that its statements are “*a priori* transcendental synthetic propositions” (Kant, 1974, A 722/B 750). But those philosophical “transcendental” propositions are merely “discursive” — namely, in contrast to the statements or judgments of physics and mathematics, they neither inform us about objects nor determine anything regarding them. They are simply statements regarding concepts that concern how the “I think” works with and synthesizes objects. In the 1787 version of his Introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant accordingly uses the term “transcendental” to refer to a *special type* of “knowledge” that deals not “so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible *a priori*” (Kant, 1974, B 25)⁴. This special type of knowledge is thus that of “transcendental philosophy”. Hence insofar as *philosophy* is *transcendental*, it is not a type of knowledge called “experience” — i.e., it is not characterized as being directed to and focused upon objects, but rather as being “reflexively” and “critically” directed towards “our manner of cognizing them” *a priori*. The latter issue deserves a separate explanation.

Indeed, only *transcendental* philosophy is able to detect — and later explicate — the *conditions* of our “*manner of cognizing objects*”. What it discovers, thanks to its reflexive attitude, is precisely that sciences such as mathematics or physics are *only possible* thanks to the fact that we possess in our human subjectivity certain *a priori* (i.e., universal and necessary) structures or formal elements, without which there

³ For example, Kant refers to the “objective use” of the “pure concepts” of reason as being “always *transcendent*, while that of the pure concepts of understanding must by its nature always be *immanent*, since it is limited solely to possible experiences”. He then adds: “Thus the pure concepts of reason we have just examined are *transcendental ideas*. They are concepts of pure reason [...]. Finally, they are transcendent concepts, and exceed the bounds of all experience, in which no object adequate to the transcendental idea can ever occur” (Kant, 1974, A 327/B 383–384 ff.).

⁴ In the 1781 Introduction, the phrasing is not so clear: “I call all cognition *transcendental* that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our *a priori* concepts of objects in general. A system of such concepts would be called transcendental philosophy” (Kant, 1974, A 11–12).

would be no scientific *ergo* “objective” knowledge, as in Newton’s science. *Transcendental* philosophy unveils these *a priori* structures or forms both in human sensibility and in human understanding, faculties that are synthetically articulated by scientific judgments or statements that express this very articulation in various forms. Transcendental philosophy’s task is thus to study these *a priori* structures — to detect them first, and then to indicate how they work. In this sense, the investigation of such structures is not “scientific” — namely, it is not “objective” — but is something more elevated: it is a “discourse *about* science”. Later, the 19th century’s neo-Kantian tradition characterized this discipline as *theory of knowledge* (*Erkenntnistheorie*), and also as *epistemology* or *theory of science* (*Wissenschaftslehre*).

Now let us see what transcendental philosophy tells us regarding these *a priori* forms according to Kant. Thanks to *sensibility*, we directly encounter empirical and individual objects, so that they are “given” to us or they “affect” us; in this sense, sensibility is *passive, receptive*. Thanks to *understanding*, on the other hand, we think about those objects in general, not individually: we judge about them, for the *function* of understanding is to build *judgments*; in this sense, understanding is *active* or spontaneous. Kant calls the *passive* faculty whereby objects are “given”, are perceived in the sense that they “affect” us, *sensible intuition*. And the objects that are given to us, or that we perceive by means of sensible intuitions, are *phenomena*. In contrast, when understanding judges (and, according to Kant, we only have twelve basic ways to do so), it spontaneously produces certain pure concepts (categories) that function as predicates of those judgments, concepts in which only the twelve synthetic functions of judgments are expressed. These categories are thus purely formal — empty — structures by themselves; they only serve to cognize in a universal manner the sensible and multiple phenomena that we grasp through sensibility. Thus Kant’s well-known assertion that sensibility without understanding is blind, and understanding without sensibility, empty. Both require each other in order that there be knowledge (Kant, 1974, A 50–52/B 74–76).

For Kant, sensibility has *two* structures or *a priori* forms that are the permanent, universal, and necessary modes whereby phenomena appear to us or affect us. Assuredly, phenomena of our “outer sense” or bodily phenomena are perceived by means of changing, random, contingent sensations that originate in our five senses, by reason of which they are called *a posteriori*. But the latter phenomena are *always* “given” to us, or “affect” us, in a *spatial* mode (one-beside-the-other) and in a temporal mode (one-after-the-other, in successive perceptions). This permanent (necessary and universal) character pertaining to *space* and *time* when we are grasping outer, corporeal objects is what Kant calls *a priori*. In contrast, we always perceive the phenomena of

our “inner sense”, i.e., the psychic or mental events or processes, in a *temporal* mode (one-after-the-other), in such a way that the *a priori* condition of their being grasped is *time*. Briefly, the *a priori* structures or forms of sensibility are *space* and *time*, the wider concept being the latter, for time is the condition of possibility of the perception of “all phenomena in general”.

According to Kant, then, space and time are not transcendent properties that belong to “things-in-themselves”, but permanent *a priori* structures that belong to *human* sensibility. And if we are intent on knowing something scientifically, this “something” must first be “given” in a spatiotemporal manner.

The formal *a priori* structures of understanding, structures spontaneously produced by understanding itself when judging, are pure concepts or categories such as unity, plurality, totality, reality, negation, limitation, substance (and accidents), causality, community (or reciprocal action), possibility, existence, and necessity. The aforementioned twelve categories stem from twelve basic types of judgments (synthetic “functions”): universal, particular, singular, affirmative, negative, infinite, categorical, hypothetical, disjunctive, problematic, assertoric, and apodictic. Categories are nothing but mere logical predicates that express the unifying *function* of judgments (Kant, 1974, A 68–69/B 83); i.e., they are empty by themselves, unless they are used as predicates of phenomena provided by sensible intuition. The *a priori* articulation of phenomena of sensible intuition on the one hand and categories on the other takes place precisely when judging, and such articulation is expressed in the type of judgment that Kant characterizes as “*a priori* synthetic judgment”, the type of judgment that sciences such as mathematics and physics employ. It is a “synthetic judgment” because its predicates (categories) synthesize the diverse elements that stem from sensibility (the sensible phenomena), unifying them and subsuming their diversity under the twelve universal forms. And this synthesis is precisely the activity of understanding under the supreme unifying function of the “I think”. In contrast to the *a priori* synthetic judgments of mathematics, Kant uses the term “judgment of experience” to name scientific judgments (namely, synthetic *a priori* judgments) corresponding to physics. In general, synthetic *a priori* judgments also differ from “analytic *a priori* judgments”, for in the case of the latter the ground upon which the relation of their predicates and their subjects is based is purely intellectual (and lies in understanding itself); their predicates are obtained from the concepts stemming from the concept of the subject. Thus these latter judgments are purely logical, abstract, tautological, and formal, built without having either to exit understanding or ever having to appeal to sensibility. Synthetic *a priori* judgments also differ from “*a posteriori* synthetic judgments” in that the latter lack necessity and universality due to the fact that their

predicates stem, like their subjects, from the “matter” of sensibility, i.e., from the multiplicity of sensations.

We said that the sole interest of *transcendental* philosophy is to detect, justify the use of, and describe the function of the *a priori* forms or structures of sensibility and understanding, which are the conditions of possibility of scientific knowledge. Due to the fact that critical philosophy’s “type of knowledge” is precisely “transcendental”, the title of the whole first part of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (which is the propaedeutic discipline of transcendental philosophy) is “Transcendental Doctrine of the Elements” (Kant, 1974, A 12/B 25). Those elements are the *a priori* forms of sensibility, studied by “transcendental aesthetics”, and the pure *a priori* concepts of understanding and reason, studied by the “transcendental analytic” as well as by the first chapter on the “transcendental dialectic”, both sections as parts of “Transcendental Logic” (Kant, 1974, A 15/B 29).

But Kant does not limit himself to the aforementioned meaning of the “transcendental”. He also terms the *a priori* forms themselves “*transcendental* conditions of possibility” (Smith, 1984, 75 ff.) of scientific knowledge, forms both of sensibility and understanding. Finally, it is not only the *a priori* forms that are considered “transcendental”, but also the *spontaneous activities* of understanding, namely, the functions synthesizing the phenomenal multiplicity that stems from sensibility at diverse levels: a first synthesis at the level of *apprehension* or grasping in sensible intuition; a second synthesis at the level of the imagination’s *reproduction*; and a third synthesis at the level of *recognition* under the unity of the concept, whereby all of those levels of syntheses are ultimately ruled by the “I think” or the “*transcendental* apperception” (Kant, 1974, A 106/B 139).

Briefly put, then, there are up to four meanings of the term “transcendental” that remain side by side in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*: *first*, “transcendental” in the sense of what is “transcendent”, i.e., that which lies beyond possible experience — this is the case, among many examples, for the “ideas of pure reason” (soul, world, and God) that, as “transcendental ideas”, are not objects of a possible experience, although they do fulfil a positive role in the *regulative* use of reason; *second*, “transcendental” in the sense of “transcendental philosophy” as a form of *discursive* knowledge — neither scientific nor objective — “that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible *a priori*” (Kant, 1974, A 11–12/B 25); *third*, “transcendental” in the sense of the *a priori* forms of sensibility and understanding; and, *fourth*, “transcendental” in the sense of the supreme principle of the “synthesis” carried out by the “transcendental I think” or “transcendental apperception” (Kant, 1974, B 131–143).

3. THE MEANING OF THE “TRANSCENDENTAL” IN HUSSERL

As I have already mentioned, Edmund Husserl retrieves the 19th century Kantian concept of the transcendental, reshaping it and expanding its reach. He studied both Kant and the neo-Kantians, and in his debate with the empiricists and neo-Kantians of his time, he allies himself more on the neo-Kantian side. However, when he publishes his inaugural work, *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901), he does not initially embrace the Kantian notion of the transcendental understood as the “*a priori* and pure forms of sensibility and understanding”, directing very harsh critiques at this doctrine for several reasons. First, he believes that if Kant considers them *a priori*, i.e., universal and necessary conditions of possibility of sciences’ *objective* knowledge, they are indeed “forms” of *human* sensibility and understanding, and in that sense are still “relative” to our “subjective constitution”. Husserl is concerned with the epistemological and gnoseological “relativism” that this entails, for even if it is not an “individual relativism” like that of the empiricists, it is indeed an extended “specific relativism” — namely, a relativism of the “human species” — and all relativism is in truth a form of “scepticism” (Husserl, 1975, § 17–20, § 36–37). Furthermore, Kant imports the notions of space and time from the physics of his time and assigns them to sensibility, just as he imports the law of causality and other laws dealt with by the physical sciences such as Newton’s, assigning them to human understanding (Husserl, 1970, § 28, § 30, § 56). He also adopts Aristotle’s logical categories, conferring upon them an alleged systematic genesis and incorporating them into understanding as its structural forms. With these instruments in hand he built his “transcendental” philosophy according to an architectonic criterion rather than erecting it on the basis of sheer description founded upon the observation of human experience. In contrast, Husserl wishes to rely instead upon the description of his own experiential observations, characterizing the “method” of his nascent phenomenology as a “descriptive method” from the very beginning.

Nevertheless, those same observations and descriptions lead Husserl to reconsider his critiques of Kant and to become aware of the relevance of the concept of the “transcendental”. Thus around 1908 he begins to use the term, first in referring to a “type” of *reflexive* knowledge that in Kant’s words “is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects” (Husserl, 1985, 424–430). This is how his “transcendental phenomenology” is born, as the philosophy in charge of describing the conditions of possibility of our experiences of the transcendent or of objectivities in general (Husserl, 1956, 386). But ever since 1903, even before using the term, his phenomenological philosophy is already interested in clarifying the *a*

priori — i.e., unavoidable — conditions of every possible human experience thanks to which such experiences endow our surrounding world with sense and validity.

In order to reach the conditions of possibility of every possible human experience and describe them, Husserl proposes the “method of ἐποχή and phenomenological reduction” as the method whereby the “natural attitude” concerned with the surrounding world and its objects changes into the “phenomenological attitude” — reflexively oriented to the conditions of possibility of our experience of those surrounding objects and of the world. Distancing himself from Kant, however, Husserl does not understand “experience” solely as “cognitive” experience, let alone as cognitive experience in the strong sense of the objective sciences, whether formal (such as logic, arithmetic, or analysis in general), ideal (such as Euclidian geometry), or empirical-deductive (such as physics). According to Husserl, the cognitive lived experiences of the sciences — which involve a higher degree of rationalization and develop at a predicative level, i.e., by means of judgments using the instrument of language — already begin their development at a pre-predicative level, namely, with simple perception along with a series of lived experiences related to it such as memory, image-consciousness, phantasy, expectation, or empathy. In other words, their development begins *before* we formulate concepts, enunciate judgments, or reason with the help of language. On the other hand, he claims that different types of science involve different types of cognitive experience and thus have different ways of being verified. The sciences, in his view and in that of several philosophers of his time (such as critics of a neo-Kantian tradition), include not only mathematical and empirical-deductive sciences (such as physics), but also “cultural” or “spiritual” (social or human) sciences, which produce a *sui generis* type of scientific knowledge that differs from the “hard” sciences, but have their own methods of validation. Finally, the human experiences that are laid bare by transcendental phenomenology after applying the phenomenological method also include non-cognitive experiences such as valuative experiences (pertaining to the field of emotions and feelings) and willing experiences (pertaining to the practical sphere of the will). Each of those experiences — theoretical, valuative, and practical — may be the object of descriptions that must clarify their “essential” or “pure types”, their structures or conditions of possibility, and their different “functions”.

Among the main structures or “conditions of possibility” of all those lived experiences and of consciousness in general, Husserl identifies the “pure I” (equivalent to Kant’s “I think” or “transcendental apperception”), *temporality*, and *intentionality* (Husserl, 1977, § 80–84). The latter two permeate and determine every lived experience in general. Regarding the *temporality* of consciousness, Husserl is also inspired

by Kant, although time is not for Husserl the mere “form” of the apprehension of sensible phenomena, but rather the “form” in which all conscious and unconscious lived experiences necessarily flow, and thus affects in general *how* we experience absolutely *everything* that stands as correlate to our cognitive, willing, or emotional lived experiences, whether we are referring to them linguistically or intuitively, or wishing or evaluating, and so forth. Consciousness is described by Husserl as a flux “of lived experiences that not only arise one *after* the other, but continuously and synthetically flow *into* one another in such a way that new ones continuously emerge while others “sink”, as it were, into the past and unconsciousness. Here Husserl retrieves the Kantian terms of *synthesis* and *horizon* to characterize the temporality of consciousness (Husserl, 1977, § 81–82, 118; Husserl, 1973, § 17–20). But, whereas for Kant all the levels of *syntheses* (intuitive, imaginative, and conceptual) are ultimately the function of understanding and its “I think” or “transcendental apperception”, for Husserl the *temporal syntheses* of conscious lived experiences are basically *associative*, *passive*, and *continuous* syntheses that we do not consciously or actively “control”. Only when we judge, predicate, or reason, carrying out higher (conscious, more rational) acts of consciousness, do we consciously synthesize a subject with a predicate in an act of judging. But in the latter case, we are dealing with *discrete* syntheses that are the product of the intentional, rational lived experiences of an *active* “I think”, and are thus to be distinguished from the *continuous* syntheses of the deep temporality of *consciousness* (Husserl, 1977, § 118).

So far, we have clarified not only the Kantian remnant in Husserl’s concept of the “transcendental”, but also the expansion of its meaning. However, the third structure or *condition of possibility* of the lived experiences of transcendental consciousness — *intentionality*, which Husserl retrieves from his teacher Franz Brentano (1838–1917) and amplifies (in a way that does not stem from Kant, but from the Scholastics or even from Aristotle) — gives a new sense to the term “transcendental”. According to the concept in question, all human lived experiences — whether cognitive, emotional, evaluative, volitional, etc. — are characterized by “intentionality”: i.e., in all of them we are conscious *of something*, we are *referred to something* (whether persons, animals, things, values, norms, or ideal objects such as numbers or geometric figures, and so forth). Thus for Husserl, *intentionality* is the pure (i.e., *a priori* or essential) structure found in the totality of human consciousness *in general*, as “consciousness *of*”.

But in Husserl’s view, the “transcendental” character of intentional consciousness reveals itself through an additional element. On the one hand, in every “consciousness *of*” we are conscious of objectivities, events, norms, people, etc., *in different ways*. Indeed, we may perceive or remember, value or desire *the same* objectivity,

and in each one of these diverse lived experiences (perception or memory, valuing or desiring), this *same* objectivity “appears”, “is given” to us, “we refer to it” in *different* ways. On the other hand, however, Husserl observes that when one and same objectivity is successively grasped in *different lived experiences* of the *same type* (such as in different perceptions, or as referred to in *different successive statements*), it “appears”, “is given to us”, or is grasped in different ways. For example, we may refer to the planet Venus either as the “morning star” or as the “evening star”; to Napoleon either as the “victor at Jena” or as the “vanquished at Waterloo”; or to the same type of triangle now as “equilateral”, now as “equiangular”. This means that the “mode” in which objectivities are “referred to”, “apprehended”, “judged”, or the way in which they *appear* or are given to us in perception, remembrance, expectation, fantasy, etc., somehow *depends* upon the *type of experience* we have of them. This “mode” of “referring” to them or “seizing” them is, Husserl remarks, the *sense* (perceptive, evaluative, volitional, and so forth) that we endow them with, or the *meaning* (conceptual, linguistic) that we predicate of them.

Some of these *senses* and *meanings* are merely “empty” or “unfounded”, i.e., “unverified” opinions or beliefs regarding things, people, or events, such as making certain linguistic references to things without having them before us. But other *senses* and *meanings* are “validated”, “verified”, “founded”, “demonstrated”, as when diverse experiences of those same objects successively allow us to endow them with senses or meanings that mutually coincide across these diverse experiences in continuous syntheses of identification, consistently maintained through *time*. Still more evident and more “objective” are senses produced by concordant lived experiences of different subjects through *time*, senses that are mutually founded in “syntheses of identification”. To obtain “objectivity” in a strong scientific sense, synthetically concordant intersubjective lived experiences are needed. On the other hand, those senses and meanings may lose the validity or evidence through which they acquired their “objective” status if during the course of time other experiences contradict them, as when we perceive a puddle of water when driving along the road, but find on looking back through the window that the puddle has disappeared. The sense of our second perception does not synthetically agree with the first — it cannot be identified with the prior perception of a puddle, and this “contradiction” allows us to understand that we are dealing with a mirage. The former “perceptual sense” reveals itself as “baseless” thanks to the new ones that follow.

Consequently, the *intentional correlation* between our experiences (some simpler and other higher or more rational), on the one hand, and the objectivities that surround us, on the other, are *mediated* by those *senses* and *meanings*, validated or not.

There are thus *three* terms in intentional correlation: lived experiences (also called *no-eses*); *senses* and *meanings* (also called *noemas*); and *transcendent objectivities*. The animate or inanimate, real or ideal objectivities are for us *what they are* according to the *manner* in which they appear. They are “transcendences” that are indeed *there*, in our surrounding world, as real objectivities or ideal objectivities (such as numbers), but we “apprehend” them in lived experiences that endow them with diverse *senses* and *validations*. For Husserl, this *function* of “bestowing senses” and validating them — a function pertaining to our lived experiences and *intentional* consciousness — is also termed *transcendental*: these lived experiences are *transcendental experiences* of a *transcendental consciousness*. And for him the *function* of “sense-bestowing” is “*constitution*”, since we bestow meanings on things and on the world in a *temporal succession* of experiences. We do not have a divine or instantaneous apprehension of things; we do not perceive or understand things *sub specie aeternitatis*. The meaning that things acquire by means of our experiences is temporally constituted. And this constitution of the meaning of things takes place when we enter into contact with them. In this sense, *consciousness* and *intentional experiences* are both *transcendental*. But the *senses* and *meanings* of transcendent objectivities that we “constitute” the moment we grasp them are also *transcendental*, for senses and meanings are the result of the *way in which* what is transcendent is apprehended by our consciousness. Sometimes Husserl names this constituted sense “pure phenomenon” or *noema*.

We said that for Husserl, transcendental phenomenology claims to be the knowledge of the *transcendental character* of experiences and of human intentional consciousness insofar as they have the function of “meaning-giving and validation of being” (Husserl, 1952, 139). We have also pointed out that the *conditions of possibility* of the transcendental character of these experiences are, for Husserl, *temporality*, *intentionality*, and the *pure I*, which are *a priori* (or “eidetic”) structures that we have the possibility of “intuiting” (grasping) and “describing” after abandoning the natural attitude and directing the phenomenological gaze upon them. Thus Husserl intends to correct the Kantian interpretation of the transcendental conditions of possibility of experience, structures that the philosopher of Königsberg does not directly observe by means of unprejudiced examination, but borrows from Aristotelian logic (the categories) or from Newton’s physics (such as space and time).

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, and in very general terms, both in Kant and in Husserl the word “transcendental” may have three meanings that refer to three different things. *First*,

they use it to refer to the *reflexive-philosophical* knowledge “that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition (or experience) of objects, insofar as this is to be possible *a priori*”; i.e., it means the knowledge of certain *essential conditions* that render all human experiences *possible*. In this sense Kant spoke of “transcendental philosophy” and Husserl of “transcendental phenomenology”. *Second*, they also use the term “transcendental” to refer to those same *conditions of possibility* of knowledge or of the experience of objects. According to Kant, these are the *a priori* forms of sensibility (space and time) and of understanding (categories), crowned by the synthetic activity or synthesis of the “I think”, or “transcendental apperception”, and refer to scientific knowledge. According to Husserl, these conditions of possibility are the pure structures of intentionality, temporality, and the “pure I” that “accompanies all our representations”, as Kant also used to say. *Finally*, for Kant the sense of the “transcendental” also encompasses the *synthetic functions* that the “I think” carries out to constitute “scientific judgments” or “synthetic *a priori* judgments” as the “objects of scientific knowledge,” for the latter are indeed the result of a construction that transcendental subjectivity carries out by subsuming the sensible phenomena under the categories of understanding. For Husserl, the sense of the “transcendental” encompasses the constitutive function of meanings and validations, from the cognitive to the evaluative or volitional, from the simplest sensible meanings to the most rational and scientific.

In this sense, Kant as well as Husserl respectively characterized their transcendental philosophies as “*transcendental idealisms*”. Such an idealism differs radically, as Kant points out, from Descartes’ “*problematic idealism*”, a “theory that declares the existence of objects in the space outside us to be [...] merely doubtful and *indemonstrable*”, or from Berkeley’s “*dogmatic idealism*”, which also declares that the existence of things in space outside us is “*false and impossible*”, namely, “merely imaginary” (Kant, 1974, B 274). Husserl too distinguishes his “transcendental idealism” from Berkeley’s “subjective idealism” in his 1913 *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (Husserl, 1977, § 55), and from Descartes’ prejudiced “scholasticism” and *more geometrico* ontology, incapable of making “the transcendental turn” (Husserl, 1973, 62 ff.). The claim that intentional consciousness is a “*sense-affording consciousness*” (Husserl, 1976, 120) is not tantamount to denying “the fully valid being of the world, as the universe of realities” (Husserl, 1976, 120). When speaking of applying phenomenological methods (the *ἐποχή* and the transcendental reduction) in order to redirect his gaze and bring to light the intentional and transcendental achievements of consciousness, Husserl states the following: “If I do this, as I am completely free to, then I *do not negate* this ‘world,’ as though I were a sophist;

I do not doubt its existence, as though I were a sceptic” (Husserl, 1976, 65). What the method does is simply to place it within brackets or disconnect our automatic acceptance of it in order to examine the experiences in which this world acquires meaning and ontic validity for us.

As I have indicated, this “transcendental function” of consciousness that Kant introduced into the history of philosophy has not been well understood by certain contemporary philosophers who have interpreted it as a reduction of transcendent reality to the immanence of an autarchic and solipsistic “I think”, and thus as a concept that should not be retrieved as other concepts may be (concepts that allegedly do exhibit some current validity). But thanks to the fact that neo-Kantianism keeps this concept alive until the 20th century, and due to the fact that Husserl fortunately rescues it from oblivion, refining and amplifying it — stripping it of some controversial elements that still remained in its first formulation by Kant — we can affirm its current relevance and interest. Even Heidegger, during his Marburg period, uses the term not only in his readings of Kant and Husserl, but also when elaborating his own fundamental ontology or *Dasein’s* existential analytics (Crowell, Malpas, 2007), granting it a new ontological reach. And currently there is a renewed interest in the work of Kant and Husserl, thanks to whom a better *understanding* of the sense and current validity of the concept of the “transcendental” has begun to emerge, both in epistemology, cognitive sciences, mathematics, and the relation of physics with biology (Bitbol, Kerszberg, Petitot, 2009; Zahavi, 2017).

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