

Friedrich Schelling (1800)

System of Transcendental Philosophy

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Introduction

§ 1. Concept of Transcendental Philosophy

1. All knowledge is founded upon the coincidence of an objective with a subjective. - For we know only what is true; but truth is generally taken to consist in the coincidence of presentations with their objects.

2. The intrinsic notion of everything merely objective in our knowledge, we may speak of as nature. The notion of everything subjective is called, on the contrary, the self, or the intelligence. The two concepts are mutually opposed. The intelligence is initially conceived of as the purely presentative, nature purely as what can be presented; the one as the conscious, the other as the non-conscious. But now in every knowing a reciprocal concurrence of the two (the conscious and the intrinsically non-conscious) is necessary; the problem is to explain this concurrence.

3. In knowing as such - in the fact of my knowing - objective and subjective are so united that one cannot say which of the two has priority. Here there is no first and second; both are simultaneous and one - Insofar as I wish to explain this identity, I must already have done away with it. To explain it, inasmuch as nothing else is given me (as explanatory principle) beyond these two factors of knowledge, I must necessarily give priority to one over the other, set out from the one, in order thence to arrive at the other; from which of the two I start, the problem does not specify.

4. Hence there are only two possibilities.

A. Either the objective is made primary! and the question is: how a subjective is annexed thereto, which coincides with it?

The concept of the subjective is not contained in that of the objective; on the contrary, they exclude one another. The subjective must therefore be annexed to the objective. - The concept of nature does not entail that there should also be an intelligence that is aware of it. Nature, it seems, would exist, even if there were nothing that was aware of it. Hence the problem can also be formulated thus: how does intelligence come to be added to nature, or how does nature come to be presented?

The problem assumes nature or the objective to be primary. Hence the problem is undoubtedly that of natural science, which does just this. - That natural science in fact - and without knowing it - at least comes close to the solution of this problem can be shown - briefly here.

If all knowing has, as it were, two poles, which mutually presuppose and demand one another, they must seek each other in all the sciences; hence there must necessarily be two basic sciences, and it must be impossible to set out from the one pole without being driven toward the other. The necessary tendency of all natural science is thus to move from nature to intelligence. This and nothing else is at the bottom of the urge to bring theory into the phenomena of nature. - The highest consummation of natural science would be the complete spiritualising of all natural laws into laws of intuition and thought. The phenomena (the matter) must wholly disappear, and only the laws (the form) remain. Hence it is, that the more lawfulness emerges in nature itself, the more the husk disappears, the phenomena themselves become more mental, and at length vanish entirely. The phenomena of optics are nothing but a geometry whose lines are drawn by light, and this light itself is already of doubtful materiality. In the phenomena of magnetism all material traces are already disappearing, and in those of gravitation, which even scientists have thought it possible to conceive of merely as an immediate spiritual influence, nothing remains but its law, whose largescale execution is the mechanism of the heavenly motions. - The completed theory of nature would be that whereby the whole of nature was resolved into an intelligence. - The dead and unconscious products of nature are merely abortive attempts that she makes to reflect herself; inanimate nature so-called is actually as such an immature intelligence, so that in her phenomena the still unwitting character of intelligence is already peeping through. - Nature's highest goal, to become wholly an object to herself, is achieved only through the last and highest order of reflection, which is none other than man; or, more generally, it is what we call reason, whereby nature first completely returns into herself, and by which it becomes apparent that nature is identical from the first with what we recognise in ourselves as the intelligent and the conscious.

This may be sufficient to show that natural science has a necessary tendency to render nature intelligent; through this very tendency it becomes nature-philosophy, which is one of the necessary basic sciences of philosophy. [The further elaboration of the concept of a nature-philosophy, and its necessary tendency, is to be found in the author's Sketch for a System of Nature-Philosophy, coupled with the Introduction to this sketch and the elucidations that are to appear in the first number of the Journal for Speculative Physics.]

B. Alternatively, the subjective is made primary, and the problem is: how an objective supervenes, which coincides with it?

If all knowledge rests upon the coincidence of these is undoubtedly the supreme problem for all knowledge; and if, as is generally admitted, philosophy is the highest and foremost of all sciences, we have here undoubtedly the main problem of philosophy.

However, the problem only requires an explanation of the concurrence as such, and leaves it completely open as to where explanation starts from, as to which it should make primary and which secondary. - Yet since the two opposites are mutually necessary to each other, the result of the operation is bound to be the same, whichever point we set out from.

To make the objective primary, and to derive the subjective from that, is, as has just been shown, the problem of naturephilosophy.

If, then, there is a transcendental philosophy, there remains to it only the opposite direction, that of proceeding from the subjective, as primary and absolute! and having the objective arise from this. Thus nature-philosophy and transcendental philosophy have divided into the two directions possible to philosophy, and if all philosophy must go about either to make an intelligence out of nature, or a nature out of intelligence, then transcendental philosophy, which has the latter task, is thus the other necessary basic science of philosophy.

§ 2 Corollaries

In the course of the foregoing, we have not only deduced the concept of transcendental philosophy, but have also furnished the reader with a glimpse into the entire system of philosophy; this, as we see, is constituted of two basic sciences which, though opposed to each other in principle and direction, mutually seek and supplement one another. Here we shall not set forth the entire system of philosophy, but only one of the basic sciences, and the derived concept thereof will thus first receive a more exact characterisation.

[Only on completion of the system of transcendental philosophy will one come to recognise the necessity of a nature-philosophy, as a complementary science, and thereupon desist from making demands upon the former, which only a nature-philosophy can satisfy].

1. If the subjective - the first and only ground of all reality - is for transcendental philosophy the sole principle of explanation for everything else (§1), then it necessarily begins with a general doubt as to the reality of the objective.

Just as the nature-philosopher, directed solely upon the objective, has nothing he more dearly wishes to prevent than an admixture of the subjective into knowledge, so the transcendental philosopher, by contrast, wishes nothing more dearly than to avoid an admixture of the objective into the purely subjective principle of knowledge. The means of separation lie in absolute scepticism - not the half-scepticism which merely contends against the common prejudices of mankind, while never looking to fundamentals, but rather that thoroughgoing scepticism which is directed, not against individual prejudices, but against the basic preconception, whose rejection leads automatically to the collapse of everything else. For in addition to the artificial prejudices implanted in mankind, there are others far more fundamental, laid down in us not by art or education, but by nature herself; prejudices which, for everyone but philosophers, serve as the principles of all knowledge, and for the merely self-made thinker rank even as the touchstone of all truth.

The one basic prejudice, to which all others reduce, is no other than this: that there are things outside us. This is a conviction that rests neither on grounds nor on inferences (since there is not a single reputable proof of it) and yet cannot be extirpated by any argument to the contrary (*naturam furea expellas, tamen usque redibit*); it makes claim to immediate certainty, since it assuredly relates to something entirely different from us, and even opposed to us, of which we understand not at all how it enters into immediate consciousness; and hence it can be regarded as nothing more than a prejudice - innate and primary, to be sure - but no less a prejudice on that account.

The contradiction, that a principle which by nature cannot be immediately certain is yet accepted as blindly and groundlessly as one that is so, is incapable of resolution by the transcendental philosopher, save on the presupposition that this principle is not just covertly and as yet uncomprehendingly connected with, but is identical with, one and the same with, an immediate certainty, and to demonstrate this identity will in fact be the concern of transcendental philosophy.

2. But now even for the common use of reason, nothing is immediately certain save the proposition I exist; which, since it actually loses its meaning outside immediate consciousness, is the most individual of all truths, and the absolute preconception, which must first be accepted, if anything else is to be certain. - The proposition There are things outside us will therefore only be certain for the transcendental philosopher in virtue of its identity with the proposition I exist, and its certainty will likewise only be equal to the certainty of the proposition from which it borrows its own.

Transcendental cognition would thus differ from ordinary cognition on two counts.

First, that the certainty that external things exist is for it a mere prejudice, which it goes beyond, in order to discover the grounds thereof. (It can never be the transcendental philosopher's business to demonstrate the existence of things-in-themselves, but merely that it is a natural and necessary prejudice to assume that external objects are real.)

Second, that it separates the two propositions, I exist, and There are things outside me, which in ordinary consciousness are fused together; setting the one before the other, precisely in order to prove their identity, and so that it can really exhibit the immediate connection which is otherwise merely felt. By this very act of separation, if complete, it shifts into the transcendental mode of apprehension, which is in no way natural, but artificial.

3. If only the subjective has initial reality for the transcendental philosopher, he will also make only the subjective the immediate object of his cognition: the objective will become an object for him indirectly only, and whereas in ordinary cognition the knowing itself (the act of knowing) vanishes into the object, in transcendental cognition, on the contrary, the object as such vanishes into the act of knowing. Transcendental cognition is thus a knowing of knowing, insofar as it is purely subjective.

Thus in intuition, for example, only the objective element attains to ordinary consciousness, the intuiting itself being lost in the object; whereas the transcendental mode of apprehension merely glimpses the intuited through the act of intuiting. - Again, ordinary thinking is a mechanism governed by concepts, though they are not distinguished as concepts; whereas transcendental thinking suspends this mechanism, and in becoming aware of the concept as an act, attains to the concept of a concept. - In ordinary action, the acting itself is lost sight of in the object of action; philosophising is likewise an action, yet not only an action but also at the same time a continuous scrutiny of the self so engaged.

The nature of the transcendental mode of apprehension must therefore consist essentially in this, that even that which in all other thinking, knowing, or acting escapes consciousness and is absolutely non-objective, is therein brought to consciousness and becomes objective - it consists, in short, of a constant objectifying-to-itself of the subjective.

The transcendental artifice will thus consist in the ability to maintain oneself constantly in this duality of acting and thinking.

§ 3 Preliminary Division of Transcendental Philosophy

This division is preliminary, because the principles of division can only be first derived in the science itself.

We revert to the concept of the science.

Transcendental philosophy has to explain how knowledge as such is possible, it being presupposed that the subjective element therein is to be taken as dominant or primary.

It therefore takes as its object, not an individual portion, nor a special object of knowledge, but knowledge itself and knowledge as such.

But now all knowledge reduces to certain primordial convictions or primordial prejudices; transcendental philosophy must trace these individual convictions back to one fundamental conviction; this one, from which all others are derived, is formulated in the first principle of this philosophy, and the task of finding such a principle is nothing other than that of finding the absolute certainty whereby all other certainty is mediated.

The division of transcendental philosophy itself is determined by those original convictions whose validity it vindicates. These convictions must first be sought in the common understanding. - And if we thus transport ourselves back to the standpoint of the common outlook, we find the following convictions deeply rooted in the human understanding.

A. That there not only exists a world of things outside and independent of us, but also that our presentations are so far coincident with it that there is nothing else in things save what we attribute to them. This explains the constraint in our objective presentations, that things should be unalterably determined, and that our own presentations should also be mediately determined by this determinacy of things. This first and most fundamental conviction suffices to determine the first task of philosophy: to explain how our presentations can absolutely coincide with objects existing wholly independent of them. - The assumption that things are just what we take them to be, so that we are acquainted with them as they are in themselves, underlies the possibility of all experience (for what would experience be, and to what aberrations would physics, for example, be subject, without this presupposition of absolute identity between appearance and reality?) Hence, the solution of this problem is identical with theoretical philosophy, whose task is to investigate the possibility of experience.

B. The second and no less basic conviction is this, that presentations, arising freely and without necessity in us, pass over from the world of thought into the real world, and can attain objective reality.

This conviction is in opposition to the first. The first assumes that objects are unalterably determined, and thereby also our own presentations; the second assumes that objects are alterable, and are so, in fact, through the causality of presentations in us. On the first view there is a passage from the real world into the world of presentation, or a determining of presentation by an objective; on the

second, there is a passage from the world of presentation into the real world, or a determining of the objective by a presentation (freely generated) in ourselves.

This second conviction serves to determine a second problem, namely how an objective can be altered by a mere thought, so that it perfectly coincides therewith.

Upon this conviction the possibility of all free action depends, so that the solution of this problem is identical with Practical philosophy.

C. But with these two problems we find ourselves involved in a contradiction. - B calls for a dominance of thought (the ideal) over the world of sense; but how is this conceivable if (by A) the presentation is in origin already the mere slave of the objective? - Conversely, if the real world is a thing wholly independent of us, to which (as A tells us) our presentation must conform (as to its archetype), it is inconceivable how the real world, on the contrary, could (as B says) conform itself to presentations in us. - In a word, for certainty in theory we lose it in practice, and for certainty in practice we lose it in theory; it is impossible both that our knowledge should contain truth and our volition reality.

If there is to be any philosophy at all, this contradiction must be resolved - and the solution of this problem, or answer to the question: how can we think both of Presentations as conforming to objects, and objects as conforming to presentations? is, not the first, but the highest task of transcendental philosophy.

It is easy to see that this problem can be solved neither in theoretical nor in practical philosophy, but only in a higher discipline, which is the link that combines them, and neither theoretical nor practical, but both at once.

How both the objective world accommodates to presentations in us, and presentations in us to the objective world, is unintelligible unless between the two worlds, the ideal and the real, there exists a pre-determined harmony. But this latter is itself unthinkable unless the activity, whereby the objective world, is produced, is at bottom identical with that which expresses itself in volition, and vice versa.

Now it is certainly a productive activity that finds expression in willing; all free action is productive, albeit consciously productive. If we now suppose, since the two activities have only to be one in principle, that the same activity which is consciously productive in free action, is productive without consciousness in bringing about the world, then our predetermined harmony is real, and the contradiction resolved.

Supposing that all this is really the case, then this fundamental identity, of the activity concerned in producing the world with that which finds expression in willing, will display itself in the former's products, and these will have to appear as products of an activity at once conscious and non-conscious.

Nature, both as a whole, and in its individual products, will have to appear as a work both consciously engendered, and yet simultaneously a product of the blindest mechanism; nature is purposive, without being purposively explicable. - The philosophy of natural purposes, or teleology, is thus our point of union between theoretical and practical philosophy.

D. All that has so far been postulated is simply an identity of the non-conscious activity that has brought forth nature, and the conscious activity expressed in willing, without it being decided where the principle of this activity belongs, whether in nature or in ourselves.

But now the system of knowledge can only be regarded as complete if it reverts back into its own principle. Thus the transcendental philosophy would be completed only if it could demonstrate this identity - the highest solution of its whole problem - in its own principle (namely the self).

It is therefore postulated that this simultaneously conscious and non-conscious activity will be exhibited in the subjective, in consciousness itself.

There is but one such activity, namely the aesthetic, and every work of art can be conceived only as a product of such activity. The ideal world of art and the real world of objects are therefore products of one and the same activity; the concurrence of the two (the conscious and the non-conscious) without consciousness yields the real, and with consciousness the aesthetic world.

The objective world is simply the original, as yet unconscious, poetry of the spirit the universal organon of philosophy - and the keystone of its entire arch - is the philosophy of art.

§ 4 The Organ of Transcendental Philosophy

1. The sole immediate object of transcendental concern is the subjective (§2); the sole organ of this mode of philosophising is therefore inner sense, and its object is such that it cannot even become, as can that of mathematics, an object of outer intuition. The mathematical object is admittedly no more located outside the knowing - process than that of philosophy. The whole existence of mathematics depends upon intuition, and so it also exists only in intuition, but this intuition itself is an external one. The mathematician, furthermore, is never concerned directly with intuition (the act of construction) itself, but only with the construct, which can certainly be presented externally, whereas the philosopher looks solely to the act of construction itself, which is an absolutely internal thing.

2. Moreover, the objects of the transcendental philosopher exist not at all, save insofar as they are freely produced. - One cannot be compelled to such production, as one can, say, by the external depiction of a mathematical figure, be compelled to intuit this internally. Hence, just as the existence of a mathematical figure depends on outer sense, so the entire reality of a philosophical concept depends solely on inner sense. The whole object of this philosophy is nothing else but the action of the intellect according to determinate laws. This action can be grasped only through immediate inner intuition on one's own part, and this too is possible only through production. But that is not all. In philosophising, one is not simply the object of contemplation, but always at the same time the subject. Two conditions are therefore required for the understanding of philosophy, first that one be engaged in a constant inner activity, a constant producing of these original acts of the intellect; and second, that one be constantly reflecting upon this production; in a word, that one always remain at the same time both the intuited (the producer) and the intuitant.

3. Through this constant double activity of producing and intuiting, something is to become an object, which is not otherwise reflected by anything. - We cannot here demonstrate, though we shall in the sequel, that this coming-to-be-reflected of the absolutely non-conscious and non-objective is possible only through an aesthetic act of the imagination. This much, however, is apparent from what we have already shown, namely that all philosophy is productive. Thus philosophy depends as much

as art does on the productive capacity, and the difference between them rests merely on the different direction taken by the productive force. For whereas in art the production is directed outwards, so as to reflect the unknown by means of products, philosophical production is directed immediately inwards, so as to reflect it in intellectual intuition. The proper sense by which this type of philosophy must be apprehended is thus the aesthetic sense, and that is why the philosophy of art is the true organon of philosophy (§3).

From ordinary reality there are only two ways out - poetry, which transports us into an ideal world, and philosophy, which makes the real world vanish before our eyes. - It is not apparent why the gift for philosophy should be any more widely spread than that for poetry, especially among that class of persons in whom, either through memory-work (than which nothing is more immediately fatal to productivity), or through dead speculation, destructive of all imagination, the aesthetic organ has been totally lost.

4. It is needless to linger over the commonplaces about a native sense of truth, since we are wholly indifferent to its conclusions, though one might ask what other conviction could still be sacred to one who takes for granted the most certain of all (that there are things outside us). - Let us rather take one more look at the so-called claims of the common understanding.

In matters of philosophy the common understanding has no claims whatever, save that to which every object of enquiry is entitled, namely to be completely accounted for.

Thus it is no concern of ours to prove the truth of what it takes to be true; we merely have to lay bare the inevitability of its delusions. - It is agreed that the objective world belongs only to the necessary limitations which make self-consciousness (the I am) possible - for the common understanding it is sufficient if from this opinion itself the necessity of its own view is again derived.

For this purpose it is necessary, not only that the inner workings of our mental activity be thrown open, the mechanism of necessary presentation unveiled, but also that it be shown by what peculiarity of our nature it is ordained, that what has reality merely in our intuition is reflected to us as something present outside us.

Just as natural science brings forth idealism out of realism, in that it spiritualises natural laws into laws of mind, or appends the formal to the material (§1), so transcendental philosophy brings forth realism out of idealism, in that it materialises the laws of mind into laws of nature, or annexes the material to the formal.

PART ONE

On the Principle of Transcendental Idealism

SECTION ONE

On the Necessity and Character of a Supreme Principle of Knowledge

1. It will be assumed meantime as a hypothesis, that there is indeed reality in our knowledge, and we shall ask what the conditions of this reality may be. - Whether

there is actually reality in our knowledge will depend on whether these initially inferred conditions can be actually exhibited later on.

If all knowledge rests upon the coincidence of an objective and a subjective (§1), the whole of our knowledge consists of propositions which are not immediately true, which derive their reality from something else.

The mere putting-together of a subjective with a subjective gives no basis for knowledge proper. And conversely, knowledge proper presupposes a concurrence of opposites, whose concurrence can only be a mediated one.

Hence there must be some universally mediating factor in our knowledge, which is the sole ground thereof.

2. It will be assumed as a hypothesis, that there is a system in our knowledge, that is, that it is a whole which is self-supporting and internally consistent with itself. - The sceptic denies this presupposition, like the first, and like the first it can be demonstrated only through the fact itself. - For what would it be like, if even our knowledge, and indeed the whole of nature (for us) were internally self-contradictory? - Let us then assume merely, that our knowledge is a primordial whole, of which the system of philosophy is to be the outline, and renew our preliminary enquiry as to the conditions of such a whole.

Now every true system (such as that of the cosmos, for example) must contain the ground of its subsistence within itself; and hence, if there be a system of knowledge, its principle must lie within knowledge itself.

3. There can only be one such principle. For all truth is absolutely on a par. There may certainly be degrees of probability, but there are no degrees of truth; one truth is as true as another. But that the truth of all propositions of knowledge is absolutely equal is impossible, if they derive their truth from different principles (or mediating factors); so there can only be one (mediating) principle in all knowledge.

4. This principle is the mediating or indirect principle in every science, but the immediate and direct principle only of the science of all knowledge, or transcendental philosophy. ...

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