

## *Ontology, Metaphysics, and Transcendental Philosophy*

### I Introduction

So far I have examined Kant's efforts to reform post-Leibnizian metaphysics without considering the term by which his critical philosophy is commonly identified, namely, transcendental philosophy. Regardless of its ubiquity in the literature, however, it is far from clear what the term actually stands for in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and the same can be said of other terms modified by the adjective 'transcendental.' Neither is it clear, finally, whether the various ways in which Kant uses these terms are compatible.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever their views on these issues, most commentators seem to assume that the term 'transcendental philosophy' basically refers to the inquiry into the conditions of possibility of empirical knowledge carried out in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and other works from the critical period. This assumption is shared by scholars who relate Kant's transcendental philosophy to the scholastic treatment of so-called transcendentals such as unity, truth, and perfection. Seen from their perspective, there is

<sup>1</sup> Hinske (1970a: 24), among others, considers Kant's use of the term 'transcendental philosophy' to be highly ambivalent. Deploring the lack of a unifying meaning of the term 'transcendental' in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hinske (1998: 1382) does not mention that Kant refers to his investigation into the possibility of a priori cognition as transcendental critique rather than transcendental philosophy. What seems to be missing from Hinske's account, moreover, is the instance of transcendental philosophy of which Kant conceived as the first part of his metaphysical system, that is, the instance that in my view shares common ground with Wolffian ontology. Following Tonelli (1994), Ferrarin (2015: 235–52) lists the widely diverging meanings in which Kant uses terms such as critique, metaphysics, and transcendental philosophy without a clear attempt to sort them out. If Kant's intellectual trajectory is taken into account, Ferrarin writes, the changes in his use of these terms are "little short of incredible" (236). In this chapter, I will largely disregard Kant's evolving understanding of terms such as metaphysics, ontology, and transcendental philosophy in his unpublished notes, published writings, and lectures from the 1760s and 1770s. Studies that do so include Ficara (2006) and Rivero (2014). Commentaries that treat Kant's lectures on Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* in this regard include Ameriks (1992), Fugate (2015), Lorini (2015), De Boer (2019b), and Lu-Adler (2019).

a puzzling gap between, on the one hand, the scholastic conception of the most general determinations of all beings and, on the other hand, Kant's investigation into the subjective conditions of possibility of experience.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, I aim to untangle at least part of this knot by examining Kant's innovative conception of ontology, metaphysics, and transcendental philosophy in light of the ways in which the terms were coined and transformed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. On this basis, I argue that Kant, first, reconceived of the core task of the first part of Wolffian metaphysics – ontology or general metaphysics – as transcendental cognition and, second, considered the latter to branch out into transcendental philosophy and transcendental critique. On my reading, Kant considered transcendental philosophy in the strict sense to be a first-order investigation into the a priori concepts and principles constitutive of any cognition of objects. This task is carried out – albeit in a defective manner – in the first main part of Wolff and Baumgarten's metaphysics and is elaborated to some degree in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The mode of transcendental cognition that Kant calls 'transcendental critique,' conversely, consists in a propaedeutic, second-order investigation into the conditions under which the use of a priori concepts and principles is warranted. Unlike first-order transcendental cognition, this discipline is carried out in the *Critique of Pure Reason* alone.

Considered in this way, there is more continuity than is commonly assumed between the disciplines that used to be called *scientia transcendens*, ontology, or general metaphysics and Kant's first-order investigation into the concepts and principles constitutive of any cognition of objects.<sup>3</sup> More

<sup>2</sup> For example, the editors of the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, drawing on the contribution by Hinske, claim that "[f]rom the time of its origination until immediately prior to Kant, the concept of *transcendentia* . . . referred ontologically to the most general determinations of beings. . . . In Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy, by contrast, the term is used as a predicate of the cognition that is concerned with the a priori conditions of possibility of experience" (Ritter and Gründer 1998: 1358–59). I concur with Demange (2009) that Kant's own remarks in the *Critique of Pure Reason* on the "transcendental philosophy of the ancients" (B113–16) are not very relevant to the conception of transcendental philosophy at stake in this work. Commentators who interpret Kant's account of transcendental philosophy in light of the scholastic tradition without referring to Wolff include Knittermeyer (1953/54) and Doyle (1997). Bärthlein (1976) discusses Wolff's ontology primarily with regard to its account of the scholastic doctrine of the transcendentals. Angelelli (1972) does the same with Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*.

<sup>3</sup> My approach concurs with Fulda (1988) and Schnepf (2007a) to the extent that they consider Kant's transcendental philosophy, qua theory of objects as such, to ensue from a transformation of Wolffian ontology. However, they take into account neither Kant's notion of transcendental critique nor his reason for restricting the scope of former ontology to possible objects of experience. Similarly, Ficara (2006), among others, collapses the two modes of transcendental cognition into

generally, I hope to show that the various ways in which the *Critique of Pure Reason* uses the adjective ‘transcendental’ are less incoherent than might appear at first sight.

Although the term ‘transcendental’ is relevant to the *Critique* as a whole, Kant’s notion of transcendental philosophy first and foremost concerns the reform of former ontology at stake in the Transcendental Analytic, in particular what I have called strand [2] of Kant’s critique in the preceding chapter. Concentrating on this part of the work, the present chapter seeks to clarify Kant’s use of the term ‘transcendental’ as well as his account of the complementary tasks to be carried out by transcendental philosophy and transcendental critique.

Covering themes that readers are likely to be familiar with, Section 2 relates Kant’s conception of the relationship between general and special metaphysics to the task he attributes to transcendental logic. Section 3 provides some of the historical background to Kant’s use of the term ‘transcendental.’ Returning to Kant, Sections 4 and 5 examine the various accounts of transcendental philosophy and transcendental critique in the first *Critique*. Section 6, finally, considers Kant’s comments on Wolff’s and Tetens’s understanding of transcendental philosophy in some of his lectures on metaphysics from the 1780s.

## 2 The Task of Transcendental Logic

One of the problems with the prevailing understanding of the term ‘transcendental philosophy’ is that neither version of the Preface and Introduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason* explains the aim of the work by referring to conditions of possibility of experience. As was mentioned in the Introduction to the present book, I hold that Kant rather intended the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a propaedeutic investigation into the condition of possibility of metaphysics itself, that is, into the mode of cognition that the *Dissertation* assigns to the real use of the intellect (2:394). Seen from Kant’s perspective, Wolffian metaphysics calls for a propaedeutic investigation because it ignored the conditions under which the a priori cognitions of things as such as well as things such as the soul and God is warranted.

a broad notion of transcendental philosophy. On this basis, she more or less identifies this “new” notion of transcendental philosophy (191) with Kant’s conception of ontology qua investigation into a priori principles (12, 29) and stresses the similarities with Wolff’s conception of ontology (122–24). On my reading, by contrast, this continuity concerns transcendental philosophy only qua first-order mode of transcendental cognition.

In the Introduction, Kant frames this second-order investigation into the condition of possibility of metaphysics in terms of the problem of synthetic a priori judgments. What needs to be done, Kant writes, is

to uncover the ground of the possibility of synthetic a priori judgments with appropriate generality, to gain insight into the conditions that make every kind of them possible, and to determine, in a system, . . . this entire cognition completely and, with regard to its usage, sufficiently.<sup>4</sup>

As is well known, Kant considers synthetic judgments to connect a predicate to a subject the content of which is not contained in the subject itself (A7/B10–11). If such a judgment is a priori, that is, cannot take recourse to experience, it is unclear, Kant writes, what the “X” is “on which the understanding depends when it believes itself to discover beyond the concept of A a predicate that is foreign to it and *that is yet connected to it*” (A9, cf. B13).

Notwithstanding Kant’s references to mathematics and physics, the synthetic a priori judgments he is primarily concerned with are the ones that – warranted or unwarranted – make up metaphysics (B18, cf. B23), that is, judgments that predicate, for instance, causality of all things or immortality of the soul. According to Kant, these synthetic a priori judgments differ from the ones of which mathematics consists in that the latter spring from pure intuitions rather than pure concepts (A159/B198–99). A synthetic a priori judgment such as ‘any event has a cause’ differs from synthetic a priori judgments that belong to physics alone, on the other hand, in that they are not grounded in higher ones (A148/B188).

By considering the judgments enacted in metaphysics as synthetic a priori judgments, Kant establishes a vantage point from which it can inquire into the ground – or X – that allows the mind to make synthetic a priori judgments at all. More precisely, Kant’s second-order investigation into the activities carried out by the human mind is supposed to demonstrate why principles derived from pure concepts such as substance or causality are absolutely necessary to turn appearances into objects of cognition, but cannot be used to achieve cognition of supersensible objects (cf. Bxxvii).

Kant uses the term ‘transcendental critique’ to refer to this investigation. As he puts it, “transcendental critique . . . does not aim at the amplification of the cognitions themselves, but only at their correction, and is to supply

<sup>4</sup> A10, translation modified, cf. B73, A761/B789, Prol, 4:274. Chapter 6, Section 2, discusses this part of the Introduction in somewhat more detail.

the touchstone of the worth or worthlessness of all cognitions a priori” (A12/B26). In line with the analyses carried out by Locke and Hume, this critique examines the various activities carried out by the human mind in order to determine the limits within which cognition of objects is possible at all and, thus, rule out vacuous speculations. Unlike his empiricist precursors, however, Kant does so in order to analyze the way in which the mental faculties contribute to our *a priori* cognition of objects.<sup>5</sup>

Insofar as transcendental critique treats the rules that govern a particular kind of cognition, it can be said to share certain features with general logic. However, since general logic is not concerned with objects, it is not suitable, according to Kant, to investigate the human mind with the aim of determining under which conditions metaphysics is possible. In the following passage, he attributes this critical task to transcendental logic:

The explanation of the possibility of synthetic judgments is a problem with which general logic has nothing to do. . . . But in a transcendental logic it is the most important business of all, and indeed the only business if the issue is the possibility of synthetic a priori judgments and likewise the conditions and the domain of their validity. For by completing this task, transcendental logic can fully satisfy its goal of determining the domain and boundaries of the pure understanding.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, transcendental logic is the branch of transcendental cognition that is carried out in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and examines the role of pure thought in the a priori cognition of objects. This logic, Kant writes elsewhere, seeks to determine “the origin, the domain, and the objective validity of the cognitions “by means of which we think objects completely a priori” (A57/B81). It does so by determining the boundaries within which pure reason – considered as the source of any a priori cognition – can lawfully exert its synthetic activity. As he puts it in the second Preface,

[T]he real problem of pure reason is contained in the question: how are synthetic a priori judgments possible? . . . Metaphysics stands or falls with the solution to this problem.<sup>7</sup>

The two parts of transcendental logic that Kant distinguishes – an analytic and a dialectic – correspond to general and special metaphysics, respectively. Thus, a synthetic a priori judgment such as ‘any event has a cause’ specifies what counts as an object in the first place. Accordingly, it

<sup>5</sup> While Kant is sympathetic to Locke’s “physiology of the human understanding” (Aix), he rejects its empiricist elaboration (A86–87/B118–19).

<sup>6</sup> A154/B193, cf. A14/B28, Prol, 4:324. <sup>7</sup> B19, cf. Axii, Prol, 4:274–76.

constitutes a principle of cognition that used to be treated in general metaphysics or ontology. In the Transcendental Analytic, Kant considers these principles to rest on the pure concepts listed in the Metaphysical Deduction and treats them under the heading of principles of the pure understanding.<sup>8</sup>

Drawing on these principles, a second kind of synthetic a priori judgment seeks to determine supersensible things such as the soul or God by means of the intellect alone. These judgments, and the concepts on which they are based, used to be treated in the various parts of special metaphysics and are scrutinized in the Transcendental Dialectic.

In a passage from the Preface to the second edition partly quoted in the preceding chapter, Kant obliquely explains the task of critique in relation to this distinction between general and special metaphysics.<sup>9</sup> If we were to adopt the view that objects conform to our cognition, rather than the other way round, he notes, the first part of metaphysics – that is, the discipline formerly called general metaphysics – might well be raised into a science:

This experiment . . . promises the secure course of a science to *metaphysics in its first part*, where it concerns itself with concepts *a priori* to which the corresponding objects appropriate to them can be given in experience. For after this alteration in our way of thinking we can very well explain the possibility of a cognition *a priori* and, what is still more, we can provide satisfactory proofs of the *a priori* laws constitutive of nature qua sum total of objects of experience. (Bxviii–xix, emphasis mine)

No less than the Wolffian tradition, Kant considers the first part of metaphysics to treat concepts constitutive of any cognition of objects such as substance, causality, and necessity. Yet Kant here refers only implicitly to former general metaphysics or ontology, because he seeks to demonstrate, according to strand [2] of his critique, that the use of these concepts is warranted with regard to possible objects of experience alone. The difference between ‘things’ or ‘beings’ and ‘objects of experience’ is a crucial one, for in this context the term ‘object’ refers exclusively to the content of judgments brought about by the human mind.

If the scope of the first part of metaphysics were restricted in this regard, Kant maintains, then its second part – former *special* metaphysics – would be deprived of the means to make synthetic a priori judgments about the soul, the world as such, and God. As he puts it,

<sup>8</sup> A148–235/B187–287. I consider Kant’s discussion of this topic in Chapter 6.

<sup>9</sup> Texts in which Kant draws this connection explicitly include R4855 (dated 1776), R4851 (dated 1776–78), and LM Mrongovius (1782–83), 29:768. On this, see Höffe (2003: 19).

this deduction of our faculty of cognizing *a priori* in the first part of metaphysics yields a . . . result . . . that appears very disadvantageous to the whole purpose with which *the second part of metaphysics* is concerned, namely, that with this faculty we can never get beyond the boundaries of possible experience, which is nevertheless precisely the most essential occupation of this science. (Bxix, emphasis mine)

However, it does not follow from this that Kant is prepared to give up the main assets of former special metaphysics completely. As was argued in Chapter 2, he considers critique to disentangle the rational core of a discipline from its untenable elements. What ought to be preserved in the case of special metaphysics are the ideas of reason, in their capacity as regulative principles, as well as a number of their purely intellectual determinations. *A priori* judgments about human freedom, the soul, and God, conversely, ought to be transferred to a discipline supposedly immune to skeptical attacks on the theoretical part of metaphysics, namely, its practical part:

[A]fter speculative reason has been denied all advance in this field of the supersensible, what remains to be tried is whether there are not data in reason's practical cognition (*praktische Erkenntnis*) for determining the transcendent rational concept of the unconditioned mentioned above and, thus, in accordance with the wish of metaphysics, to move beyond the boundaries of all possible experience with our cognitions *a priori*, which are, however, possible only insofar as they have a practical aim.<sup>10</sup>

For now, I will disregard the way Kant actually carries out the first part of the investigation he calls transcendental logic, and focus on his reason for conceiving of the various aspects of his critical project as modes of transcendental cognition. Since Kant's use of the term 'transcendental' seems to create more problems than it resolves, a brief discussion of the term's history is warranted.

### 3 'Transcendental Philosophy' Prior to Kant

By the time Wolff published his metaphysical treatises, the term *transcendens* was no longer used primarily to refer to the determinations of being – including unity, truth, and perfection – that thirteenth-century scholars such as Aquinas and Duns Scotus considered to transcend the generality of

<sup>10</sup> Bxxi, translation modified (the translation has 'practical data' for *praktische Erkenntnis* and the final clause, unlike the German, is ungrammatical). Cf. Bxxxii–xxxiv.

the categories listed by Aristotle.<sup>11</sup> Duns Scotus had already enlarged the domain of *transcendentalia* with further predicates, coining the term *scientia transcendens* to refer to the discipline concerned with any determinations of being qua being.

During the seventeenth century, the discipline called ontology or general metaphysics also became known as *scientia transcendentalis*, a term that goes back to Duns Scotus's conception of metaphysics as *scientia transcendens*. Thus, the terms 'transcendental science' and 'ontology' both came to refer to the part of metaphysics concerned with concepts that can be predicated of all beings and, as such, provide the other disciplines with their basic principles.

As seen, the first part of Wolff's German *Metaphysics* is simply called "On the First Grounds of Our Knowledge and All Things as Such." Even though Wolff must have been familiar with the term *scientia transcendentalis*, he chose to call the Latin version of his first philosophy *Philosophia prima sive ontologia* rather than transcendental science or something to that effect. That is why commentators who deal with this issue tend to ignore Wolff's works and, instead, compare Kant's conception of transcendental philosophy with the Scholastic treatment of transcendentals and Kant's discussion of them in the second edition of the first *Critique* (cf. B113–17). If, by contrast, one takes into account Wolff's reason for referring to the first part of his metaphysics as ontology, as I will do in what follows, then Kant's conception of transcendental philosophy – qua first-order investigation into basic concepts and principles – may well turn out to be more akin to that of his German predecessors.

In his Latin works, Wolff uses the term 'transcendental' to denote a doctrine that treats those concepts and principles that are presupposed in the applied part of the discipline and possibly in other disciplines. Thus, he refers to the Latin version of his general cosmology as *cosmologia transcendentalis* because it is concerned with the most general, or essential,

<sup>11</sup> Aquinas distinguished six transcendentals (*ens, res, aliquid, unum, verum, bonum*), that is, determinations that transcend the difference between infinite and finite beings and accordingly must be predicated of all beings. Duns Scotus enlarged the number of *transcendentia* by including conceptual determinations that come into pairs, such as necessity and possibility, and finite and infinite, because one of them can always be predicated of a being. He was the first to refer to the science that is concerned with the transcendentals as *scientia transcendens*, identifying this science with metaphysics. Thanks to Suarez, among others, this conception of metaphysics became influential during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The same discipline also became known as *theoria, scientia, or philosophia transcendentalis* (rather than *transcendens*), terms that were known to Wolff. The accounts of these developments from which I have drawn include Vollrath (1962), Courtine (1990), Honnefelder (1990), Honnefelder (1995), and the works by Hinske, Bärthlein, and Demange mentioned in the introduction to this chapter.



determinations of the world as such. This transcendental cosmology differs from ontology in that it deals with the world as such rather than all beings. In this capacity, it provides the hinge between ontology, on the one hand, and physics, on the other.<sup>12</sup> As Wolff explains in the *Latin Cosmology*, he called the discipline

transcendental, because in it only such things are demonstrated of the world that accrue to it as to a composite and modifiable being, so that indeed it stands to physics in the same manner as ontology or first philosophy to universal philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

Accordingly, it seems to me that Wolff might have used the term 'transcendental science' rather than 'ontology' to refer to the Latin version of his first philosophy.

Wolff notes in his *Anmerkungen* that he decided to use the term *Grundwissenschaft* as the German equivalent of *ontologia* to dissociate the discipline from its bad reputation among the Cartesians:

In German I call the *ontologia* fundamental science (*Grundwissenschaft*)... I need the term 'fundamental science' because in this part of philosophy one clarifies the first grounds of cognition... [A]part from this reason, I also took into account the circumstance that one has currently thrown out the baby with the bathwater, at the expense of the sciences, and I have therefore chosen a name that indicates the utility of this science.<sup>14</sup>

What should be retained from these passages is that Wolff conceived of ontology as a foundational discipline *that treats the most general concepts and principles relevant to a particular domain* and for that reason might as well be called transcendental science. Seen in this way, the meaning the term 'transcendental' received within the Wolffian tradition is akin to that of the scholastic notion of *scientia transcendens* – at least if we abstract from the fact that the latter dealt with determinations that transcend *any* particular domain. Clearly, in neither case does the term 'transcendental' denote an investigation into the conditions of possibility of empirical cognition. So what happened to the meaning of the term between Wolff and Kant?

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Wolff, DP 94, 97.

<sup>13</sup> Wolff, LC, 1n, cf. DP 78. On this, see Vollrath (1962: 261–62), Hinske (1968: 98–103), and Bärthlein (1976: 357–58). Kant refers implicitly to Wolff's transcendental cosmology at A334/B391–92. Seen in this light, it makes sense that Kant uses the term 'transcendental' not only to denote the mode of philosophy that was to constitute the first part of his projected metaphysics, but, analogously, also to denote disciplines such as transcendental theology (A580/B608).

<sup>14</sup> Wolff, AN 17, 32–33, cf. LO 1. Thus, Wolff held that the best way to save ontology (the child) from its scholastic elaboration (the bathwater) was to provide it with an untainted name.

#### 4 Kant's Conception of Transcendental Philosophy

In 1773, Kant told Herz about his attempt “to design an entirely new science” and the difficulties involved in “considering the method, the divisions, the search for exactly appropriate terms.”<sup>15</sup> Rather than coining new words, he later wrote in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, one should “look around in a dead and learned language” for expressions that can be used for one’s own purposes (A312/B368–69).

This is clearly something Kant did with the term ‘transcendental’ and concepts modified by it. Kant was dissatisfied with Wolff’s distinction between a general and an applied part of a particular discipline because it does not entail a clear-cut demarcation of the principles treated in these parts in terms of their origin.<sup>16</sup> Rather than equating ‘most general’ and ‘transcendental,’ as Wolff had done, Kant calls a philosophical discipline transcendental if it deals with cognitive activity or its products from a perspective that is purely intellectual rather than empirical, but differs from general logic because it is concerned with the way in which the mind turns representations into objects of cognition.<sup>17</sup> Because a transcendental discipline abstracts from any empirical content, it treats concepts and principles that are presupposed in the applied part of a particular science. For this reason, Wolffian transcendental cosmology can count as a transcendental discipline in Kant’s sense on the condition that its content does not stem from the senses.<sup>18</sup>

One of Kant’s remarkable innovations in the *Critique of Pure Reason* consists in transferring the term ‘transcendental’ from the disciplines at stake to their subject matter, that is, to the elements involved in the a priori cognition of objects. Thus, those concepts and principles are called transcendental that, first, cannot be treated in general logic because they contribute to the a priori cognition of objects and, second, cannot be

<sup>15</sup> Kant to Herz, toward the end of 1773 (10:144).

<sup>16</sup> See Diss, 2:394 and A843–44/B871–72. I elaborate on this issue in De Boer (2019b).

<sup>17</sup> This description also excludes mathematics, which according to Kant rests on pure intuition (A713/B741). Kant’s definition of transcendental philosophy at A11–12 will be discussed below. For Kant’s distinction between a logical and transcendental approach to cognition, see A44/B61, A55–56/B79–80, A262/B318–19, A574/B602. For the distinction between an empirical and transcendental approach, see A14/B28, A801/B829.

<sup>18</sup> According to Hinske (1968: 102), Wolff uses the term ‘transcendental’ in a way that is close to the original meaning of *transcendere*, since his cosmology can be said to treat of concepts and principles that “move beyond” empirical knowledge. However, I consider this approach unhelpful. As will be argued below, Kant associates only the transcendental *use* of pure concepts with the act of transcending the realm of experience, and does so in the context of his critique of Wolffian ontology.

treated in sciences such as physics or psychology because they are not empirical. Moreover, Kant applies the term 'transcendental' in this sense not only to products of cognitive activity such as concepts, schemata, or ideas but also to the activities and faculties from which they stem.

Understood in a minimal sense, accordingly, the adjective 'transcendental' denotes any cognitive element, whether an activity or a product of the latter, that is considered neither from a logical nor from an empirical perspective. If the term modifies a mode of philosophical cognition, on the other hand, it denotes this non-logical and non-empirical consideration of a priori cognitive elements itself.

This description holds true of all elements treated in the Transcendental Doctrine of Elements. The Transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental Logic – its two main parts – differ insofar as the former treats elements that stem from intuition, whereas the latter treats elements that stem from the understanding taken in the broad sense of intellect (cf. A22/B36). Within the scope of the Transcendental Logic, accordingly, cognitive elements can be called transcendental if they are considered to be purely intellectual, yet not purely logical.

These elements used to be treated in the first part of Wolffian metaphysics. One of the advantages of the term 'transcendental' over 'metaphysics' is surely that it is dissociated from Wolff's assumption that things can be known by means of the intellect alone. Thus, radicalizing Wolff's own gesture, Kant may well have taken recourse to the term 'transcendental' to distinguish the rational core of metaphysics from the bathwater of this dogmatist assumption. However, much more needs to be said about Kant's efforts to fill terms such as 'transcendental philosophy' with new meaning.

These efforts can be traced back to the end of the 1760s. Already in his Latin *Physical Monadology* (1756), Kant identified metaphysics and transcendental philosophy, apparently assuming that his readers were familiar with the latter title:

Metaphysics, therefore, which many say may be properly absent from physics, is, in fact, its only support. . . . For bodies consist of parts; it is certainly of no little importance that it be clearly established of which parts, and in what way they are combined together. . . . But how, in this business, can metaphysics be married to geometry, when it seems easier to mate griffins with horses than to unite transcendental philosophy with geometry? (1:475)

In this passage, Kant does not explicitly distinguish between general and special metaphysics. After 1769, by contrast, the terms 'transcendental philosophy' and 'transcendental logic' tend to refer to Kant's conception of

general metaphysics, or ontology, considered as a first-order discipline concerned with the concepts and principles constitutive of any cognition of objects. As Kant notes around 1769–70, “ontology is nothing other than a transcendental logic.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, he wrote to Herz in 1772 that he “sought to reduce transcendental philosophy (that is to say, all concepts belonging to completely pure reason) to a certain number of categories.”<sup>20</sup>

Evidently, these early passages do not allow us to draw conclusions as to the meaning or meanings of the term ‘transcendental philosophy’ in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant’s use of the term – and related ones – in this work is far from straightforward because he had to account for the difference between, on the one hand, the first-order investigation into pure concepts that he shares with earlier instances of general metaphysics and, on the other, his “completely new” second-order investigation into the conditions under which these concepts can actually be employed.<sup>21</sup>

In the following passage from the *Prolegomena*, concerned with the question as to the possibility of synthetic a priori cognition, Kant shifts the received meaning of the term ‘transcendental philosophy’ to the latter sense:

It can be said that the whole of transcendental philosophy, which necessarily precedes all of metaphysics, is itself nothing other than simply the complete solution of the question presented here . . . , and that until now there has therefore been no transcendental philosophy; for *what goes under this name* is really a part of metaphysics, but this science is to settle the possibility of metaphysics in the first place, and therefore must precede all metaphysics.<sup>22</sup>

Kant here explicitly contrasts the received meaning of transcendental philosophy, that is, general metaphysics or ontology, with transcendental philosophy considered as second-order investigation into the very possibility of metaphysics. However, I hold that the *Critique of Pure Reason* itself rather uses the term ‘transcendental philosophy’ to denote the first-order investigation into the a priori elements of any cognition of objects that used to be called general metaphysics or ontology. In the *Critique*, I will argue in what follows, Kant attempts to account for both disciplines

<sup>19</sup> R4152 (dated 1769–70).      <sup>20</sup> Kant to Herz, February 21, 1772 (10:132).

<sup>21</sup> Prol. 4:279, cf. Kant to Herz, 1773 (10:144–45), Kant to Garve, August 7, 1783 (10:40). Similarly, a note dated 1772 has it that transcendental philosophy “is the critique of pure reason. *Studium* of the subject, mistaking the subjective for the objective, prevention” (R4455).

<sup>22</sup> Prol. 4:279, emphasis mine. Clearly, Kant here uses the term ‘transcendental philosophy’ to denote the second-order discipline that the Introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* calls transcendental critique and distinguishes from transcendental philosophy proper (cf. A12/B26).

by conceiving of transcendental philosophy and transcendental critique as two particular instances of transcendental cognition.

According to the first edition of the *Critique*, transcendental cognition, to begin with, is a form of cognition that treats a priori – or purely intellectual – concepts of objects as such, which is an activity carried out in philosophy alone. Transcendental philosophy is subsequently defined as the system treating the sum total of these concepts, that is, I add, as the discipline that must constitute the first part of any metaphysical system:

I call all cognition (*Erkenntnis*) transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects *but rather with our a priori concepts of objects as such*. A system of such concepts would be called transcendental philosophy.<sup>23</sup>

Kant notes that the *Critique of Pure Reason* itself does not yet contain a full-fledged transcendental philosophy (A12/B25–26). Even so, one might hold on to the view that he here and elsewhere opposes transcendental philosophy to the discipline that used to be called ontology.<sup>24</sup> I have argued, however, that Wolffian ontology no less deals with the conceptual determinations of any object – from which the other sciences draw their principles – rather than actual objects. Considered in this way, Kant's conception of transcendental philosophy and Wolff's conception of ontology have much more in common than may appear at first sight.

Arguably, Kant's initial definition is a partial one because it is merely intended to distinguish transcendental cognition from sciences that seek

<sup>23</sup> A11–12. Clearly, Kant uses the term *Erkenntnis* in a broad sense in this context. On this definition, the two branches of transcendental logic carried out in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the analytic and the dialectic, constitute modes of transcendental cognition. In the second edition, the clause “our a priori concepts of objects as such” is replaced by “our mode of cognition (*Erkenntnisart*) of objects insofar as this is to be possible a priori” (B25). Clearly, the term ‘a priori mode of cognition’ covers more than ‘a priori concepts’ alone: it does not exclude the investigation into the pure forms of intuition carried out in the Transcendental Aesthetic. The *Critique* uses the term ‘mode of cognition’ with regard to intuition and thought qua activities exerted by the human mind (A262/B318) as well as with regard to products of these activities such as pure concepts (B306), judgments (A6/B10), and experience (A157/B196). Thus, while the phrase in the first edition is closer to the traditional conception of transcendental philosophy, the phrase in the second edition encompasses more adequately both transcendental philosophy qua first part of a metaphysical system and the mode of transcendental cognition Kant calls transcendental critique, that is, the investigation of pure concepts in light of the various faculties involved in their production and application (cf. A12/B26). See Pinder (1986) for a detailed discussion of these passages, especially of the peculiar expression “nicht so wohl . . . sondern.” I doubt, however, that Kant intended the subtle nuances Pinder attributes to the text. An unpublished note dated 1776–79 states unambiguously that transcendental philosophy examines not objects, but the human mind (R4873). Passages from his lectures confirm that Kant considered neither mode of transcendental cognition to be concerned with objects (see Section 6 of this chapter). In this regard, I disagree with Schnepf (2007a: 75–83, 103–6).

<sup>24</sup> This is the view of Hinske (1970a: 28, 33n).

the cognition of *objects* (empirical sciences and special metaphysics). Moreover, I take him to deliberately leave open whether transcendental cognition deals with the a priori concepts of objects as such in a dogmatic or critical fashion and, which is not the same, whether it takes the form of a first-order account of these concepts (transcendental philosophy qua first part of metaphysics) or a second-order investigation into their warranted use (transcendental critique).

An oft-cited passage from the Architectonic of Pure Reason almost identifies transcendental philosophy and former ontology qua first part of metaphysics. In this chapter, Kant sketches the structure of the metaphysical system he intended to elaborate on the basis of the propaedeutic task carried out in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, a topic that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8. In this context, Kant defines metaphysics as a discipline that provides a systematic account of the pure concepts and a priori principles that allow us to achieve cognition of something at all (A845/B873). In line with the classical distinction between ontology or general metaphysics and special metaphysics, he refers to the first part of metaphysics as transcendental philosophy and to its second part as rational physiology:

Metaphysics is the kind of philosophy that is to present [a priori] cognition in this systematic unity... Metaphysics in a narrower sense consists of *transcendental philosophy* and the physiology of pure reason. The former considers only the understanding and reason itself in a system of all concepts and principles that are related to objects as such, *without assuming objects that would be given (Ontologia)*; the latter considers nature, i.e., the sum total of *given* objects ... and is therefore physiology (though only *rationalis*).<sup>25</sup>

In accordance with his initial definition of transcendental philosophy as a system of “our a priori concepts of objects as such” (A11–12), Kant here conceives of transcendental philosophy as a first-order metaphysical discipline that does not presuppose given objects, but treats the concepts and principles constitutive of any cognition of objects in a systematic manner. Contrary to his initial definition, however, this passage explicitly states that transcendental philosophy, qua first part of metaphysics, used to be called

<sup>25</sup> A845/B837, emphasis mine, cf. A290/B346. In a similar, but more schematic note dated 1776–78, R4851, the terms *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis* are added to the diagram as equivalents to (1) transcendental philosophy qua investigation into reason and the concepts it produces and (2) rational physiology qua investigation into objects that differ from reason itself. I discuss this passage in more detail in Chapter 8, Section 2.

ontology. Thus, Kant here affirms the continuity between his first-order transcendental philosophy and Wolff's ontology without a qualm.

Yet elsewhere in the *Critique of Pure Reason* – one might object – Kant famously maintains that his analysis of the pure understanding *replaces* former ontology. The principles treated in the Transcendental Analytic, he writes,

are merely principles of the exposition of *appearances*, and the proud name of an *ontology*, which presumes to offer synthetic a priori cognitions of *things as such* in a systematic doctrine (e.g. the principle of causality), must give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding.<sup>26</sup>

This passage suggests that Kant considered transcendental philosophy and ontology to be highly different projects.<sup>27</sup> However, one discipline can only be said to replace another if they share common ground. Seen from Kant's vantage point, the discipline he calls 'analytic of the pure understanding' is similar to former ontology to the extent that both investigate the a priori concepts and principles that allow the human mind to turn something into an object of cognition at all. Whereas Kant does not share Wolff's assumption that these concepts can be attributed to all things, whether material or immaterial, he endorses the epistemological thrust of Wolffian ontology.

In sum, I take Kant to use the term 'transcendental philosophy' primarily to denote any first-order systematic treatment of the pure concepts and a priori principles constitutive of objects of cognition as such.<sup>28</sup> This formal definition fits both Wolffian ontology and the reformed transcendental philosophy Kant intended to elaborate on the basis of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

If this is granted, then Kant's reference to the "transcendental philosophy of the ancients" makes perfect sense as well.<sup>29</sup> I contend that, for Kant, this expression simply denotes the scholastic elaboration of the discipline concerned with the first principles of human cognition. This early mode of

<sup>26</sup> A247/B303, emphasis mine, cf. Prol, 4:332.

<sup>27</sup> See Grier (2001: 85–86). As regards this point, my reading is in agreement with Lu-Adler (2019: 58).

<sup>28</sup> See Pinder (1986: esp. 14–20).

<sup>29</sup> There is, Kant writes, "yet another chapter in the transcendental philosophy of the ancients that contains pure concepts of the understanding, which, although they are not reckoned among the categories, . . . should also count as a priori concepts of objects. . . . These are expounded in the proposition, so famous among the scholastics: *quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum*." According to Kant, the only real problem with these concepts is that they "were used in a merely formal sense, as belonging to the logical requirements for every cognition" and at the same time "were carelessly made into properties of things in themselves" (B113, translation modified).

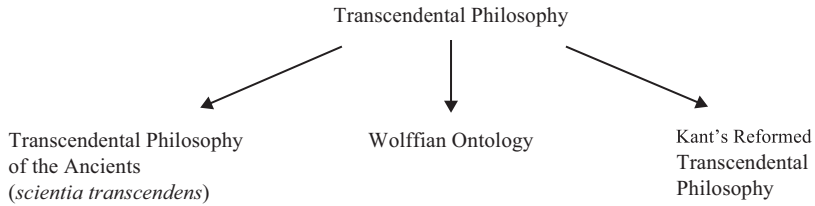


Figure 1

transcendental philosophy is distinguished from later versions by its emphasis on *transcendentalia* such as unity, truth, and perfection. Considered in this way, Kant's formal concept of transcendental philosophy contains at least three determinations (see Figure 1).

By operating with this formal conception of transcendental philosophy, Kant is able to subsequently determine the specific features – or failures – of the instances of transcendental philosophy preceding his own.

First, former instances of transcendental philosophy ignored that space and time are a priori intuitions rather than concepts (cf. A15–16/B29–30). Second, as Kant points out repeatedly, they treated pure concepts without relying on a rigorous principle and therefore attained mere aggregates rather than proper systems.<sup>30</sup> Third, transcendental philosophy always assumed that concepts such as substance and causality could be applied indiscriminately to sensible things such as billiard balls and supersensible things such as the soul, the world as such, and God.

As is well known, Kant seeks to remedy the second and third defect in the chapters of the *Transcendental Analytic* devoted to the metaphysical deduction, the transcendental deduction, and the schematism of the pure understanding. The analyses carried out in this context yield the result that transcendental philosophy – considered as the first part of metaphysics – must limit itself to a systematic treatment of the pure concepts and a priori principles involved in the cognition of objects of experience rather than that of things as such.<sup>31</sup>

Kant's use of terms such as 'transcendental cognition' and 'transcendental philosophy' must be strictly distinguished from what he calls the

<sup>30</sup> A64/B89, A831–32/B859–60.

<sup>31</sup> See Fulda (1988), Benoist (1996), and Cramer (2001) for interpretations that emphasize the shift from 'things' to 'objects' accomplished in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Contrary to Fulda, Benoist downplays Kant's determination of objects as such in terms of objects of experience (cf. 153). Similarly, Sala (1988) claims that for Kant transcendental analytic and ontology basically refer to the same discipline.



'transcendental use' of pure concepts, a subject to which I now turn.<sup>32</sup> Put generally, this expression refers to a use of pure concepts that does not rely on sensible intuition and, hence, is not limited to the realm of appearances (cf. A139). Thus, Kant in this context uses the term 'transcendental' to refer to a mode of thought that is purely intellectual yet differs from general logic in that it does not abstract from all content. By using a category in a purely intellectual way, Kant writes, the understanding merely establishes "the thought of an object as such" without determining the latter.<sup>33</sup>

Kant's formal description of the term 'transcendental use' disregards the question as to whether this type of use is warranted or not. However, the *Critique* often uses the term in a pejorative sense, namely, to characterize the strand of Wolffian ontology according to which the act of predicating pure concepts of things as such amounts to cognition proper. An example of this is the use, in former ontology, of the concept of causality to assert that all things have a cause. Seen from Kant's perspective, the principle of causality merely articulates a way in which we can produce thoughts of an object as such. Ontology is justified in *treating* this principle, but not to actually *use* the concept of causality in a judgment that purports to extend our cognition of things. Used transcendentially, such concepts lack the content required to actually determine something. Seen from Kant's perspective, they therefore should not be used in this way:

Pure categories, without formal conditions of sensibility, have merely transcendental significance, but are not of any transcendental use.<sup>34</sup>

According to Kant, categories are elements of cognition proper only to the extent that they are related to appearances. Rejecting the assumption he attributes to former ontology, he writes:

The transcendental use of a concept in any sort of principle consists in its being related to things as such and in themselves; its empirical use, however, consists in its being related merely to appearances, i.e., objects of a possible experience.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Kant introduces the term 'transcendental use' at A56/B80–81. The term here denotes the unwarranted assumption that space and time are determinations of things in themselves. Principles treated in former ontology are sometimes called 'transcendental' in this pejorative sense as well (cf. A259/B315).

<sup>33</sup> A247/B304. Similarly, the Doctrine of Method identifies the transcendental use of reason with a use that proceeds by means of "mere concepts" (A711/B739, cf. A712–13/B740–41).

<sup>34</sup> A248/B305. According to this passage, categories that are not used with regard to appearances are not completely meaningless, but not sufficiently meaningful to provide cognition proper of all things. I treat this issue in more detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>35</sup> A238–39/B297–98, cf. Bxxvii, A246/B303, A258/B314, A296/B352–53, A720–21/B748–49.

This passage suggests that the term ‘transcendental use’ replaces, at least in part, what Kant in the *Dissertation* called the real use of the intellect (2:394) and at that point did not yet take issue with. More precisely, what Kant rejects in 1781 is a use of pure concepts that aims to obtain a priori cognitions not only of appearances but also of things as such. Thus, inviting confusion, Kant uses terms such as ‘transcendental cognition’ in a way that is in agreement with Wolff’s epistemological understanding of the term ‘transcendental,’ whereas the term ‘transcendental use’ is often employed to denote a questionable assumption of former Wolffian ontology.

Insofar as pure concepts are used with regard to appearances alone, Kant calls their use ‘empirical’ (A238/B297–98) or ‘immanent’ (A296/B353). In my view, however, he attributes this empirical use not to transcendental philosophy but to the human mind insofar as it turns appearances into objects of empirical cognition, something that it does preeminently in the sciences. This is to say that transcendental philosophy qua first part of metaphysics, for its part, should not itself try to determine things independently of experience, but should merely provide a systematic account of the concepts and principles required to carry out that task.

In accordance with the distinction between general and special metaphysics, albeit without spelling this out, Kant refers to the unwarranted use of pure concepts in former *special* metaphysics as their ‘transcendent use.’ The latter differs from the transcendental use of pure concepts in that it reaches beyond appearances not in order to determine things as such, as was done in former ontology, but in order to determine things such as the soul, the world as such, and God. Drawing on ontological principles alleged to be valid of things as such, special metaphysics, Kant writes, produces principles that are transcendent in the sense that they “incite us to tear down all . . . boundary posts and to lay claim to a wholly new territory that recognizes no demarcations whatsoever.”<sup>36</sup> Enticed by the

<sup>36</sup> A296/B352. In this passage and elsewhere, the term ‘transcendent’ qualifies the principles themselves rather than their use (cf. A308/B365). In other cases, the term denotes “the objective use of the concepts of pure reason,” that is, of the ideas of the soul, the world as such, and God (A327/B383, cf. Prol, 4:374n), or these ideas themselves insofar as they are taken to refer to objects (A309/B366, A565/B593). Kant also calls the transcendent use of pure concepts “hyperphysical” (A63/B88). Seen in light of the distinction between general and special metaphysics, Kant’s distinction between the transcendental and transcendent use of pure concepts is rather straightforward: in the former case the human mind assumes that these concepts are applicable to things rather than appearances; in the latter it deliberately moves beyond experience toward particular things such as the soul or God. If we consider, moreover, that the term ‘transcendental use’ sometimes denotes *any* use of pure concepts aimed at the cognition of things independently of

principle of sufficient reason, metaphysics in this case uses pure concepts to achieve cognition of things that by definition cannot be intuited.

In sum, I take Kant to hold that pure concepts can be employed in three different ways. Whenever the human mind unifies a manifold of sensible intuitions by relying on a concept such as substance, the latter is used empirically. If the concept of substance is used transcendently, by contrast, it allows the human mind to posit, for instance, that all things consist of simple elements. This is actually done in ontology. Special metaphysics, finally, can apply this fallacious ontological principle to things that by definition cannot be sensibly intuited, and posit, for instance, that the soul is indivisible or that the world as such consists of indivisible elements.

Seen in this way, all Kant had to do in order to prevent the transcendent use of categories in special metaphysics was to reveal where former general metaphysics went wrong, a task that is carried out throughout the *Transcendental Analytic*. I have argued, however, that Kant did not wish to abandon the first-order tasks carried out in general and special metaphysics in all regards, but rather sought to achieve their self-limitation. But how does Kant account for the mode of cognition that carries out this twofold self-limitation itself? Answering this question requires that we zoom out to Kant's notion of transcendental critique and its relation to the first-order mode of transcendental cognition discussed so far.

## 5 Transcendental Critique

As was seen in the preceding section, Kant initially defines transcendental cognition as a mode of cognition that is “occupied . . . with our a priori concepts of objects as such” (A111–12). Clearly, this formal definition applies to the various instances of transcendental philosophy considered as the first part of metaphysics. As I will argue in this section, this definition also applies to the second-order investigation into the very possibility of metaphysics that is called transcendental critique and constitutes the main task of the *Critique*. Thus, returning to the notion of critique discussed in the preceding chapter, this section examines the way Kant seeks to account for the critical strand of the *Critique* by means

experience, then it makes sense that Kant sometimes uses this term in the context of his discussion of former special metaphysics as well (cf. A329/B386, A348/B406). My reading is in line with Allison (2004: 326–28). Disregarding Kant's critique of Wolffian metaphysics, Knoepffler (2001: 58–59) assumes that Kant in this context confuses the terms ‘transcendental’ and transcendent.’ See Ficara (2006: 45–46) for a similar criticism.

of terms derived from the metaphysical tradition. Before doing so, however, a few remarks on the Transcendental Analytic as a whole are in place.

In my view, we cannot make sense of the *Critique of Pure Reason* unless we see how each of its parts carries out both a first-order and a second-order investigation into a particular kind of a priori cognition. Whereas the former inquires into what these elements are, the latter assesses their actual employment.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, I take the concept of transcendental logic to refer to two complementary modes of transcendental cognition, such that one of them enacts a critical assessment of the other. Thus, insofar as the Transcendental Analytic, to which I will limit my account, treats pure concepts and their corresponding a priori principles in a systematic fashion, it engages in the first-order mode of transcendental cognition that was carried out in a defective way in Wolffian ontology and is called transcendental philosophy in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Insofar as the Transcendental Analytic seeks to determine to what extent the use of these concepts is warranted, by contrast, it engages in the second-order mode of transcendental cognition that Kant calls transcendental critique.

Various passages indicate that Kant planned to carry out the task he assigns to first-order transcendental cognition in an appropriate and comprehensive manner in the theoretical part of his projected metaphysical system.<sup>38</sup> He notes in the Introduction that, in *this* regard, the account put forward in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is preliminary and incomplete. This account identifies the “root concepts” of the a priori cognition the human mind can obtain (A13/B27), but does not provide a complete system of these cognitions themselves. Accordingly, Kant writes,

the *Critique of Pure Reason* . . . is the complete idea of transcendental philosophy, but it is not yet this science itself, since it goes only so far in the analysis as is required for the complete estimation of synthetic a priori cognition.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> This distinction is clearly reflected in Kant’s distinction between a metaphysical and transcendental exposition of space and time in the Transcendental Aesthetic (see B38, B40). In LM Volckmann (1784–85), the term ‘transcendental philosophy’ is used to refer to both the first-order investigation into basic concepts and principles and the “rational science that determines *how far* I can reach with my pure reason” (28:391–92, emphasis mine).

<sup>38</sup> The *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant notes in the Introduction, outlines “the entire plan” of transcendental philosophy “architectonically, i.e., from principles, fully guaranteeing the completeness and certainty of all the components that comprise this edifice” (A13/B27). Contrary to the translators, I take Kant here to refer to the book titled *Critique of Pure Reason* rather than to the activity denoted as critique, for the latter is precisely *not* involved in presenting the outline of Kant’s projected first-order transcendental philosophy.

<sup>39</sup> A14/B28, cf. Axxi, A12/B25, A81/B107.

Clearly, the metaphysical deduction of the categories and the chapter devoted to the principles of the pure understanding belong to the first-order mode of transcendental cognition partly carried out in the Transcendental Analytic. If brought to completion, it would deserve the name of transcendental philosophy.

Its second-order strand, conversely, prevails in the Transcendental Deduction, the Schematism Chapter, and the concluding chapter on the distinction between phenomena and noumena.<sup>40</sup> This strand seeks to demonstrate that and why the pure concepts and a priori principles that inform both the sciences and special metaphysics can be used with regard to objects of possible experience alone. As was mentioned above, this is the task that Kant attributes to transcendental critique. This discipline, he writes,

does not aim at the amplification of the cognitions themselves, but only at their correction, and is to supply the touchstone of the worth or worthlessness of all cognitions a priori. . . . Such a critique is accordingly a preparation, if possible, for an organon and, if this cannot be accomplished, then at least for a canon, in accordance with which the complete system of the philosophy of pure reason . . . can . . . be exhibited.<sup>41</sup>

Given this description, Kant appears to conceive of transcendental critique and transcendental philosophy as two complementary modes of the inquiry into a priori concepts of objects that he calls transcendental cognition (cf. A11–12/B25).

However, it is not clear that his other remarks on transcendental cognition are in keeping with this account. So let us consider a passage in which Kant defines transcendental cognition in more detail:

And here I make a remark the import of which extends to all of the following considerations, . . . namely, that not every a priori cognition must be called transcendental, but only that cognition by means of which we comprehend *that and how* certain representations (intuitions or concepts) are applied entirely a priori. (A56/B80, emphasis mine)

<sup>40</sup> Kant's investigation into the various faculties involved in the production of a priori cognition in the Transcendental Deduction may seem to belong to the first-order mode of transcendental cognition. I will argue in Chapter 5, however, that this investigation is not an end in itself, but constitutes a specific step in Kant's second-order investigation into the possibility of metaphysics. Seen in this way, this investigation belongs to transcendental critique rather than transcendental philosophy proper.

<sup>41</sup> A12/B26. The Architectonic distinguishes between critique and system of pure reason along similar lines (A841/B869). The term 'transcendental critique' is not very prominent in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but occurs throughout the work (cf. A297/B353, A498/B526, A609/B637, A712/B740, A783/B811) and is equivalent to terms that are used more frequently such as 'critique' or 'critique of pure reason.'

Since Kant makes this point in order to introduce transcendental logic qua science of “the origin, the domain, and the objective validity” of our a priori cognition of objects (A57/B81), it is clear that he conceives of transcendental logic as an instance of transcendental cognition. Kant’s remark is intended to distinguish transcendental logic from the a priori cognitions that can be obtained by non-philosophers, for example, in mathematics or physics. Thus, an a priori intuition such as space can become the subject matter of a transcendental cognition insofar as the philosopher, first, conceives of it as an a priori representation and, second, investigates how it can be related to objects of experience.<sup>42</sup> The same, Kant adds, holds for the “acts of pure thought” that constitute the subject matter of transcendental logic (A57/B81). Transcendental logic merely differs from transcendental aesthetic in the sense that it is concerned with the a priori cognitions “through which we think objects completely a priori” (A57/B81).

A related passage considers transcendental philosophy to trace pure concepts to their unique origin in the understanding as well as to analyze their pure use (A65–66/B90–91). On my reading, the former task is carried out by first-order transcendental cognition, that is, transcendental philosophy in the strict sense, while the latter task is carried out by transcendental critique. However, Kant’s use of the term ‘transcendental philosophy’ in a generic sense, here and elsewhere, obscures this distinction.<sup>43</sup> Since this generic meaning came to denote the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a whole, it became hard to distinguish between the propaedeutic function of the work and the reformed first-order transcendental philosophy that is only provisionally elaborated in the *Transcendental Analytic*.

Kant’s unpublished notes and letters indicate that he used terms such as ‘transcendental philosophy’ in a variety of ways. There is no doubt that the ensuing ambivalence has left traces on the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I have argued, however, that Kant in this work seeks to solve the problem – though not very conspicuously – by conceiving of transcendental philosophy and transcendental critique as first-order and second-order species of transcendental cognition and, hence, by considering transcendental aesthetic and transcendental logic to contain both elements. This solution

<sup>42</sup> A56/B81. Obviously, this kind of transcendental cognition is achieved in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*. The example, somewhat simplified, is Kant’s. I paraphrase the relevant passage because the German is convoluted and possibly corrupt.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. A135/B174, A424/B452 and, among many other passages, CJ, 5:289, 341. Similarly, the diagram in R4851 (dated 1776–78) considers ontology and critique as two branches of transcendental philosophy (see also R4455, dated around 1772, and R5127, dated 1776–78).

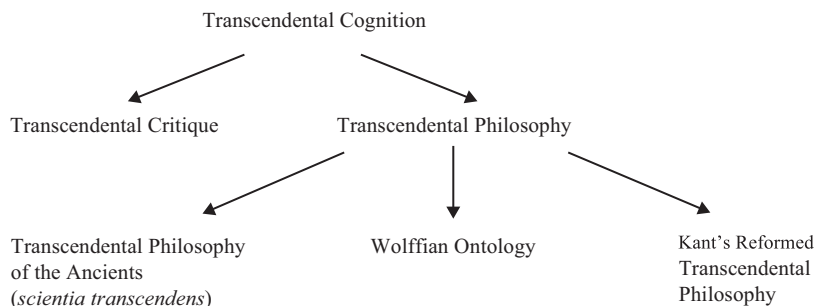


Figure 2

makes it possible, further, to conceive of transcendental philosophy qua first-order metaphysical discipline as the genus of its various historical instantiations. Seen in this way, the diagram presented above can be completed as in Figure 2.

As I see it, Kant had in mind his second-order reflection on the possibility of metaphysics – that is, transcendental critique – when he in various letters referred to the philosophy carried out in the first *Critique* as a completely new discipline or a metaphysics of metaphysics.<sup>44</sup> These references cannot be used, therefore, to maintain that the transcendental philosophy commonly attributed to Kant is new in all respects. Rather, I hold that Kant accepted many of the premises – if not the actual elaboration – of the transcendental philosophy exemplified by Wolff’s ontology. The only crucial feature he considered to be lacking from the latter was transcendental critique, as is clearly stated in the following passage, already quoted in Chapter 1, from the Preface to the second edition:

In someday carrying out the plan that criticism prescribes, i.e., in the future system of metaphysics, we will have to follow the strict method of the famous Wolff, the greatest under all dogmatic philosophers, who gave us the first example . . . of the way in which the secure course of a science is to be taken . . . ; he had the skills for moving a science such as metaphysics into this condition, if only *it had occurred to him to prepare the field for it by a critique of the organ, namely, of pure reason itself.* (Bxxxvi–xxxvii, emphasis mine)

<sup>44</sup> See Kant’s letter to Herz dated May 11, 1781 (10:269). Baum (1993: 13) also takes this passage to refer to Kant’s idea of a transcendental critique. Similarly, in R5644 (28:286, dated 1780–89), Kant notes that “metaphysics is itself the object” and refers to critique as “that which investigates its possibility.” When Kant in his letter to Garve of August 7, 1783, refers to the *Critique of Pure Reason* as “not metaphysics at all, . . . but a completely new and thus far a never attempted science,” he seems to identify the term ‘metaphysics’ with first-order metaphysics alone.

Seen from this perspective, Kant's investigation into the a priori activities carried out by the human mind is intended to reform the defective version of transcendental philosophy he attributed to Wolff and his followers rather than to provide either empirical knowledge or metaphysics with a secure foundation.

## 6 Kant's Criticism of Wolff's and Tetens's Conceptions of Ontology

This section turns to Kant's lectures on metaphysics from the 1780s because they clarify a feature of his assessment of Wolff that remains largely implicit in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. According to some of the lecture transcripts, Kant took issue with Wolff's own understanding of the discipline he called ontology or fundamental science rather than with its content, even though he considered the latter to be flawed as well.<sup>45</sup> On my reading, Kant thought Wolff should have avoided the term 'ontology' because the discipline thus denoted is in fact nothing but an analytic of the concepts and principles produced by the human mind. The term 'ontology' is misleading, Kant states, because the reference to all things equals a reference to nothing at all:

Thus, the science of all basic concepts and basic propositions upon which all of our pure cognitions of reason rests is ontology. But this science will not be properly called ontology. For to have a thing as such as an object is as much as to have no object and to treat only of cognition, as in logic. The name, however, sounds as if it had a determinate object. But this science . . . rather . . . considers understanding and reason itself, namely their basic concepts and basic propositions in their pure use . . . ; the most fitting name would be transcendental philosophy.<sup>46</sup>

This conception of transcendental philosophy – as a first-order metaphysical discipline – is completely in line with the passages from the *Critique of Pure Reason* discussed above. Unlike the latter, however, Kant's lectures allow us to see that his critique of Wolff's conception of ontology consists of two different elements. First, Kant held that Wolff should have realized that the “proud name of an ontology” (A247/B303) actually means

<sup>45</sup> For the sake of simplicity I will refer to Wolff alone even though Kant lectured on Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*. In this regard their views are similar.

<sup>46</sup> LM Mrongovius (1782–83), 29:786, cf. 755–56, 784–86; see also LM Volckmann (1784–85), 28:390–91 and LM L<sub>2</sub>/Pölitz, 28:541–42 (around 1790). Similarly, Kant states in a note dated 1776–78 that “metaphysics deals not with objects, but with cognitions” (R4853). See also R3948 (dated 1769) and R4369 (dated 1771–75).



nothing else than transcendental philosophy, conceived as analytic of thought, and should therefore be replaced by the latter. Seen in this way, it is no coincidence that Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* urges that the "proud name" of the discipline be replaced rather than the discipline itself. Second, Kant considered Wolff's former ontology itself to be misguided, and this first and foremost because of its assumption that categories such as substance and causality can be employed in empirical sciences as well as in general cosmology, rational psychology, and natural theology. Contrary to the term 'ontology,' the term 'transcendental philosophy' leaves completely open to which kind of things pure concepts can be applied.

However, matters are somewhat more complicated, because in the lectures from 1782 to 1783 Kant also takes issue with the way his contemporaries understood the term 'transcendental philosophy.' Thus, he is reported to maintain that

no one has had a *true* transcendental philosophy. The word has been used and understood as ontology, but (as it is easy to make out) this is not how we take it. In ontology one speaks of things in general, and thus actually of no thing – one is concerned with the nature of the understanding for thinking of things – here we have the concepts through which we think things, namely, the pure concepts of reason – hence it is the science of the principles of pure understanding and of reason.<sup>47</sup>

In this passage Kant does not target Wolff, but takes issue with contemporaries who had replaced the term 'ontology' by that of 'transcendental philosophy' without reforming the discipline along Kantian lines.

Indeed, as Krouglov and others have pointed out, prior to Kant both Lambert and Tetens had used German versions of the term to denote the first, general part of metaphysics. Thus, in the *Architectonic*, published in 1771, Lambert uses the term 'transcendent' with regard to theories that abstract from the various domains to which a concept can be applied.<sup>48</sup> As he acknowledges, the term 'transcendent' in this sense is akin to its scholastic meaning.<sup>49</sup> In 1775, Tetens used the term 'general transcendent philosophy' to denote the part of metaphysics devoted to the highest and most general principles of human cognition. These principles, he writes in his *On General Speculative Philosophy*,

<sup>47</sup> LM Mrongovius, 29:752, emphasis mine. Kant uses the term 'transcendental philosophy' here with regard to what I have called its first-order mode, that is, general metaphysics. See Prol, 4:279, for a similar passage.

<sup>48</sup> Lambert, Arch 29. See Krouglov (2005: 46–47), who points out that Lambert does not yet distinguish between 'transcendent' and 'transcendental.'

<sup>49</sup> Lambert, Arch 301.

consist in certain general judgments about the relations between things and their properties. The first, most general concepts are our representations of things or objects themselves as such.<sup>50</sup>

Tetens's conception of transcendental philosophy is close to Kant's insofar as he considers the discipline to be concerned with concepts rather than things.<sup>51</sup> According to Kant, however, Lambert and Tetens no less than Wolff assumed that the pure concepts treated in transcendental philosophy could be applied to material as well as to immaterial things.<sup>52</sup> What is lacking in both Wolffian ontology and the modern conceptions of transcendental philosophy known to Kant, in short, is a preliminary reflection on the limits within which pure concepts can be applied, a form of reflection to which his lectures too refer as critique:

The critique of pure reason belongs necessarily to transcendental philosophy. But since one used to treat ontology without a critique – what was ontology then? An ontology that was not a transcendental philosophy.<sup>53</sup>

In this passage, I take it, Kant once more uses the term 'transcendental philosophy' in the formal sense of any investigation into the concepts and principles produced by pure understanding and pure reason. If this investigation is carried out without a preliminary critique, as was the case in the Wolffian tradition, it will conceive of itself as an ontology concerned with the basic determinations of sensible as well as supersensible things (and preeminently with the latter). In that case, it does not amount to transcendental philosophy proper qua first-order discipline.

Clearly, Kant considered it the task of transcendental philosophy in this sense to examine cognitions rather than things and, hence, to reflect on its

<sup>50</sup> Tetens, ASP 36. While Allison (2015: 144n) points to the lack of evidence that Kant had read this work, I take it to be very likely he had done so.

<sup>51</sup> "Transcendent philosophy," Tetens writes, "is nothing but a general theory that in itself is no more concerned with actual things than the analysis of the mathematicians. It has the same nature as the latter, and it might well be called a higher analysis of things, if it did not possess a sufficient number of names and titles already" (ASP 24, cf. 18).

<sup>52</sup> Tetens indeed maintains that "the fundamental science should contain the universal principles according to which we judge and infer about all things as such, about all genera of actual beings, about spirits and bodies, about the immaterial and the material, about the infinite and the finite" (ASP 51). In a note dated 1776–78, Kant contrasts his own transcendental philosophy with Tetens's investigation by arguing that the latter did not question the objective validity of pure concepts (R4900, cf. R4901). See Allison (2015: 143–63) and Blomme (2018) for recent discussions of Kant's relationship to Tetens. Krouglov (2005) suggests that Tetens may have influenced Kant's use of the term 'transcendental philosophy' in German. However, since Kant used the term already in his 1772 letter to Herz, it seems to me that Lambert's *Architectonic* is a more likely source of both Tetens's and Kant's adoption of the term.

<sup>53</sup> LM Mrongovius, 29:784–85.

proper nature and limits in a way precluded to its Wolffian instantiations. In other words, transcendental cognition must enact itself as a second-order critique in order to accomplish its first-order investigation into the a priori elements of all cognition in an adequate way. Moreover, insofar as first-order transcendental philosophy aims to identify and clarify the a priori elements of any cognition of objects, it already contains the seeds of the second-order mode that Kant calls transcendental critique. The latter, conversely, allows first-order transcendental philosophy to be turned into a proper science. Seen in this way, there is no gap between, on the one hand, the various instances of general metaphysics, ontology, or first-order transcendental philosophy elaborated in the history of philosophy and, on the other hand, the reflection of metaphysics on its proper sources and limits to which Kant refers as transcendental critique.

## 7 Conclusion

Kant's occasional use of the term 'transcendental philosophy' in a generic sense makes it hard to grasp the logic, if it can be called that, that governs the multiple meanings of the term 'transcendental' in the *Critique*. This chapter has tried to clarify at least part of this logic by distinguishing three main clusters.

First, insofar as the term 'transcendental' modifies a type of *philosophical cognition*, I have argued, it denotes a discipline that treats the constitution of a priori cognition from a perspective that is purely intellectual yet not logical. This formal notion of transcendental cognition allows Kant to conceive of transcendental philosophy – and its historical instantiations – as a first-order investigation into the concepts and principles constitutive of any cognition of objects and of transcendental critique as a second-order variety of the same. Given this distinction, the critique of metaphysics carried out in the *Critique* and the system of pure reason Kant intended to establish on its basis can be regarded as complementary modes of transcendental cognition.

Second, Kant transfers the term 'transcendental' from the philosophical discipline to the *contents* it treats, that is, to the various cognitive elements involved in the a priori cognition of objects. In this sense, a term such as 'transcendental imagination' refers to the imagination insofar as it is treated from a perspective on a priori cognition that is purely intellectual, but differs from general logic in that it does not abstract from all content.

Third, Kant uses the term 'transcendental' to denote the *use* of pure intuitions or concepts in judgments about things as such. As far as Kant's

critical account of the pure understanding and pure reason is concerned, the term refers to a use of pure concepts that is purely intellectual yet not logical. Clearly, this meaning of 'transcendental' is in line with the core meaning of the term. However, Kant often employs the term 'transcendental use' pejoratively, namely, to denote the efforts on the part of former metaphysics to obtain knowledge of things by means of the intellect alone.

Seen in this way, the various ways in which Kant uses the adjective 'transcendental' can be traced back to, on the one hand, his effort to disentangle the gnoseological strand of Wolffian metaphysics from its dogmatist view on the power of the intellect and, on the other hand, his attempt to account for the status of this critique itself. My reading entails, obviously, that Kant did not refer to the project carried out in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as transcendental philosophy because it examines conditions of possibility of experience, as most commentators have it. Nevertheless, the meaning of the terms 'transcendental' and 'condition of possibility' can be said to converge to the extent that Wolff's pre-critical elaboration of transcendental philosophy, qua first philosophy, no less than Kant's reformed version of the latter investigates the concepts and principles that ground any cognition of objects. Unlike the Wolffians, however, Kant's *Critique* examines these a priori elements of any mode of cognition in view of the a priori activities carried out by the human mind. He does so, moreover, with an intention completely unknown to them, namely, to demonstrate that pure reason cannot obtain knowledge of things in themselves. Evidently, this contested issue requires a separate chapter.