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## ARTICLE

# Transcendental Idealism at the Limit: On A. W. Moore's Criticism of Kant

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The philosophical outlook which Adrian Moore has developed in his previous writings is rich, deep, and original, and these virtues are no less present in *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*. Moore's admirable book exemplifies a creativity, and generosity of philosophical outlook, which is nothing less than inspirational. In this paper I will focus on the relation between Moore's general philosophical outlook and his treatment of Kant.<sup>1</sup> My disagreements with Moore are, in the bigger picture, at the level of footnotes; concerning the philosophical interest of transcendental idealism and its pre-eminence as a theme in late modern philosophy, I am in enthusiastic agreement with Moore and grateful for his account.

### Moore's critique of transcendental idealism

Kant occupies a crucial role in Moore's story of the development of modern metaphysics. The chapter on Kant begins:

At this point in the narrative something extraordinary happens. What has gone before and what will come after are both largely to be understood in terms of what occurs here. Like the central node in a figure "X", this point can be seen as a singularity that draws together the various strands above it and issues in those below it [...] [T]here would never be a great philosopher after this point who was not a post-Kantian philosopher.<sup>2</sup>

Kant owes this pivotal position to his transcendental idealism. The theme of transcendental idealism is prominent in the chapters on all of Fichte, Hegel, Wittgenstein, Husserl and Heidegger, and it also figures in the discussions of Nietzsche, Collingwood and Dummett.

Moore's estimate of transcendental idealism is, however, negative: he considers that transcendental idealism is – for reasons that are essentially quite straightforward – *incoherent*. The great value of transcendental idealism lies in its nonetheless furnishing, by dint of the specific manner and reasons for its incoherence, an insight into the fundamental situation and nature of metaphysics: transcendental idealism provides the central motor for the development of philosophy after Kant, and it stands immediately behind the (re)conception of metaphysics that Moore spells out in the Conclusion of his book.

Let me begin by going over the treatment of Kant in Moore's earlier *Points of View*, which *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics* carries over.

The aim of the earlier book is to defend the realist master claim that absolute representations, representations from no point of view, representations of *what is there anyway*, are possible; that Bernard Williams is right about the absolute conception. Moore calls this 'the Basic Assumption', and explains that he will not attempt to argue for it, for it is, he suggests, as deeply primitive an assumption as there can be: it is coeval with our sense of reality as something substantial.<sup>3</sup> In place of furnishing a proof or justification, the task for Moore is to determine if this assumption can survive philosophical criticism.

Transcendental idealism poses, by Moore's lights, the most interesting and powerful challenge to the Basic Assumption: as Moore construes it, transcendental idealism asserts that all representations are radically perspectival, meaning that absolute representations are impossible. Moore argues that transcendental idealism fails to unsettle the view that absolute representations are possible, for the simple and conclusive reason that transcendental idealism is incoherent.

A number of conjoined arguments are given for this conclusion. The key statement of the argument, or cluster of arguments, is the following passage in Chapter 6, §1:

[Transcendental idealism] looks self-stultifying [...] First, there is no way of stating the view without producing a representation of the very kind it says we cannot produce. Take the claim that the physical universe depends on the existence of our representations. It is no good treating this claim as transcendentally true but immanently false. The transcendent interpretation does not exist. If it did, it would not be transcendent. If we really cannot produce a representation to the effect that the physical universe depends on the existence of our representations without saying something false, then the physical universe does not depend on the existence of our representations. At a more general level, we cannot represent limits to what we can represent. For if we cannot represent anything beyond those limits, then we cannot represent our not being able to represent anything beyond those limits. [...]

I said these objections appeared decisive. I think they are. Transcendental idealism is incoherent.<sup>4</sup>

As the point is elsewhere succinctly put: 'The "transcendent" denial that absolute representations are possible undercuts itself and collapses into an unregenerate affirmation that they are.'<sup>5</sup>

The further discussion of transcendental idealism in *Points of View* is concerned with a variant construal of the doctrine, which seeks to sidestep the objection just put, by declaring that transcendental idealism, though true, *cannot be stated* – in other words, that transcendental idealism is *inexpressibly true*, and as such belongs to the class of things that can (only) be *shown*, in place of being *said*; a position that the early Wittgenstein may be thought to maintain.

This notion of inexpressible-but-showable truth is however rejected by Moore, on the grounds that what can be *shown*, as opposed to what can be said, must be unqualified *nonsense*, 'pure and utter' nonsense, lacking *all* sense, and so is not a candidate for truth.

This then encounters the objection that a distinction must surely be drawn between good and bad nonsense – a statement of transcendental idealism is not nonsensical in the same way as a randomly selected string of words.

Moore accepts that a distinction must be drawn between nonsense that is philosophically significant and nonsense that is not – which means for him, more particularly, between nonsense that results from the *attempt* to express the inexpressible and nonsense that does not – and replies to the objection with the claim that this distinction can be drawn on *non-semantic*, *aesthetic* grounds:

[W]e can think of the Nonsense Constraint as offering the following guideline when it comes to making sense of the schema 'A is shown that x': namely, to prescind altogether from considerations of content and to think more in aesthetic terms. I think this is just the guideline we need. To say of some piece of nonsense that it is the result of attempting to express the inexpressible is *something like* making an aesthetic evaluation. It concerns what might be called, justly, if a little grandiloquently, the music of words.<sup>6</sup>

Moore goes on to suggest that Kant's own aesthetic theory gives us some idea of what this aesthetic capacity consists in, and of the reasons that may be given for expecting there to be convergence in aesthetic appraisal in general, and thus also in our estimates of good and bad nonsense.

Also involved in Moore's (extraordinarily rich and original) account is a further claim, which need not be expanded on here but which should at least be mentioned, in view of its relevance to the notion that nonsense of the right kind is philosophically purposive: Transcendental idealism indexes, Moore argues, a state of *ineffable knowledge*.<sup>7</sup> Endeavours to express the inexpressible are manifestations (though not communications) of states of ineffable knowledge. This explains the captivating power of transcendental idealism, the profundity of its aesthetic aspect.

In sum, transcendental idealism, though *not true*, and *nonsensical*, is nonetheless nonsense that results from the endeavour to *express the inexpressible*. As such it is, on Moore's thoroughly Kantian diagnosis, a proper (and perhaps even in some sense a rational) consequence of the circumstance – which is what gives rise to the inexpressible – of our being *self-consciously finite* beings with an *aspiration* to the *infinite*.<sup>8</sup>

The charge of incoherence which Moore presents in these abstract terms in *Points of View*, is made out with closer reference to more specific claims of Kant's in §§8-10 of the Kant chapter of *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*. Moore's critique opens with the following:

Kant's project seems to involve drawing a limit to what we can make sense of. But that in turn can seem an incoherent enterprise. More specifically, it can seem self-stultifying. More specifically still, it can seem vulnerable to the following argument, which [I shall call] *the Limit Argument*.

First Premise: The Limit-Drawing Principle: We cannot properly draw a limit to what we can make sense of unless we can make sense of the limit.

Second Premise: The Division Principle: We cannot make sense of any limit unless we can make sense of what lies on both sides of it.

Conclusion: We cannot properly draw a limit to what we can make sense of.<sup>9</sup>

Kant's response to the argument, Moore suggests, will be to invoke the famous distinction, which Kant requires in order to avoid contradiction as regards his negative claims regarding things in themselves, between (i) *robust positive contentful cognition* – what Moore calls 'thick sense-making', and (ii) the *mere empty 'thinking'* (without knowing) of entities – 'thin sense-making'.

With the aid of this distinction, Kant can respond to the Limit Argument by saying that the sense-making referred to in the First Premise (making sense of the *limit* to what we can make sense of) need only be of the *thin* sort – to which he will add that, in order to *thinly* draw a limit to *thick* sense, it is not necessary to *thickly* make sense of what lies on its far side. As regards the position or location *from* which Kant draws the limit to thick sense-making: this is, it follows, *outside* the limit of *thick* sense-making, but it remains *within* the (broader) sphere of *thin* sense-making.<sup>10</sup>

Moore is by no means persuaded that this dispels the incoherence of transcendental idealism, but he argues that even if the thin/thick distinction does allow Kant to preserve coherence in the context of drawing a limit to (thick) sense, it does not help in another context integral to transcendental idealism, namely with regard to the claim that we *have synthetic a priori knowledge*. This is a claim about our sense-making which, Moore thinks, needs to be not thin but *thick*:

We can approach the problem [...] by considering the very judgement that our metaphysical knowledge, like our mathematical knowledge, is synthetic and *a priori*. This must itself, presumably, count as an item of synthetic *a priori* knowledge. And yet, in registering the non-analytic character of the knowledge in question, [it has] some claim to being [...] a judgement about things in themselves [...] In acknowledging that there *is* a substantial contribution made by the *a priori* conditions of our experience to some of our knowledge, which is what we are doing when we register the non-analytic character of the knowledge, [we must] already have taken a step back from the human standpoint.<sup>11</sup>

The difficulty afflicting the transcendental idealist's assertion of the dependence of the physical world on our representations, described in the first quotation above from *Points of View*, thus

repeats itself in transcendental idealism's more general assertion of the dependence of objects of cognition on a priori subjective conditions.

The same structural problem shows itself, Moore argues, in Kant's moral Fact of Reason.<sup>12</sup> The Fact of Reason is not *just* the fact of our cognizing ourselves as subject to the moral law, which is a *deliverance* of pure reason: it is *also* (at the same time) the fact *that we have* such a thing as a capacity for pure reason. And this – just like the claim regarding the synthetic a priori – must be a fact *about* things in themselves. Kant's unease is signalled, Moore suggests, by his talk of the fact as 'forcing itself on us'.<sup>13</sup>

If we combine these claims from *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics* with the distinction of absolute and perspectival representations in *Points of View*, Moore's thesis is therefore that, in the contexts of synthetic a priori knowledge and of the Fact of Reason, it is seen that transcendental idealism needs to employ absolute representations, in order to say what it wants to say about the radically perspectival character of our representations; and that the necessity of its employing absolute representations shows up, betrays itself, in the way that Kant's claims entail, contrary to his intentions, claims to knowledge of things in themselves, as they are on the side of the subject.

The upshot, as Moore puts it, is that Kant is committed – by dint of his own claims concerning the scope, nature, conditions, and limits of knowledge – to a form of sense-making that is *neither* (straightforwardly) thick *nor* (straightforwardly) thin:

[I]n the first *Critique*, Kant is accrediting us with sense-making of a singular kind. On the one hand it is synthetic and *a priori*, which means that we cannot regard it as straightforwardly thin. On the other hand it results from sensitivity to transcendent(al?) features of our own faculties for sense-making, which means that we cannot regard it as straightforwardly thick. The truth is, we do not in the end know how to regard it. We cannot make sense of it.<sup>14</sup>

The discussion of the nonsensical, which in *Points of View* follows directly on from the critique of Kant's transcendental idealism, reappears in *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics* in the course of recounting the story of two centuries of wrestling with the structure bequeathed by Kant, chiefly in Chapter 9 on the early Wittgenstein.

In the Conclusion of *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics* we return to the notion that Kant is committed to a 'singular', neither-strictly-thin-nor-strictly-thick form of sense-making, in the context of what corresponds in this book to the aesthetic turn in *Points of View*, namely the account Moore gives of the *non-propositional* sense-making of metaphysics.<sup>15</sup> Following the early Wittgenstein, we must acknowledge the existence of 'non-propositional sense-making, such as evaluation of various kinds, understanding of various kinds, and indeed the very sense-making involved in determining the limits of propositional sense-making':<sup>16</sup>

One thing that I insist is that we allow for, and indeed take very seriously, conceptions of metaphysics in which the input is sense-making of a non-propositional kind: I shall call these non-propositional conceptions of metaphysics. Not to take such conceptions seriously, and to think that metaphysics must be a pursuit of truth, is to be in the grip of a kind of scientific prejudice. There is no rationale for it.<sup>17</sup>

Transcendental idealism is an instance of such non-propositional sense-making:

For precisely what transcendental idealism is, I would contend, is the pseudo-expression of certain non-propositional sense that can be made of things at the highest level of generality.<sup>18</sup>

**Transcendental idealism redux?**

If Moore is right, then we should expect the incoherence alleged in Kant to be reflected in the subsequent history of metaphysics, and in the third and fourth sections I will offer some comments on this issue.

The crucial *systematic* question is whether Moore is right about the incoherence of transcendental idealism. Moore's argument against transcendental idealism is internal, logically simple and, if sound, lethal. It rests on no criticisms of Kant's arguments for the doctrine. In this respect it resembles Jacobi's charge of contradiction in transcendental idealism, his famous claim that one is bound to exit the Kantian system as soon as one has entered it. If Moore is right, then Kant's steps must be retraced: whatever lines of thought led to transcendental idealism must be re-examined, and whatever problems transcendental idealism was held to solve must be (dis)solved in some other way. But none of this, no comprehensive critical review of the arguments for and the implications of transcendental idealism, is required in order for it to be declared false.

It is true that, having been declared false, transcendental idealism is thereupon submitted for diagnosis, from which it emerges as having a distinctive kind of value. In a sense, then, Moore denies that transcendental idealism is to be rejected. But for the orthodox defender of Kant, the status of 'higher nonsense' will provide no compensation.

As soon as we begin to unpick the issues, complications multiply exponentially, and since a full-scale discussion of transcendental idealism is out of the question here, I will confine myself to highlighting ways in which I think Moore is open to challenge. What follows is meant only to re-open the case against transcendental idealism. I will begin by outlining three strategies which might be thought to deliver this result, each of which focusses the argument between Moore and the transcendental idealist at a different point, and then say what I think emerges from them.

Here is one response to Moore, which will I think recommend itself particularly to those who favour the 'modest' construal of Kant's project proposed by Karl Ameriks,<sup>19</sup> and who wish to guard against the confusion of Kant's specific position with later and looser distillations from it (Putnam's 'internal realism', etc.): *Moore's criticism is based on a misconstrual of Kant's transcendental idealism. Transcendental idealism is a more circumscribed and narrowly focussed doctrine than Moore supposes. It makes no global claim regarding our representations as such and in general. Transcendental idealism is in essence a thesis about the knowledge we have of things qua their spatio-temporality. This thesis has of course repercussions, which emerge in due course. Thus we discover in the *Analytic* that we cannot employ concepts in order to determine the essences of objects in abstraction from their spatio-temporality, and that in order to do so it would be necessary for our power of concepts to double as a power of intuition, which it cannot. These are, to be sure, major results, which concern the scope of our cognition as a whole. But they fall short of the stratospheric claim about representation per se that Moore attributes to Kant, and Kant builds up to them without invoking or committing himself to any such claim. Indeed Kant's lack of interest in a thesis of global perspectivality is signalled by his affirmation of the need for the concept of the thing in itself, which affirms the possibility of what Moore calls an absolute representation. Moore is right to suppose that there could be a form of transcendental idealism which makes the global perspectival claim which he targets, and in fact this is Schopenhauer's explicit position. But Schopenhauer's transcendental idealism, which it may be agreed exhibits the inconsistencies alleged by Moore, is not Kant's.*

If it were possible to, so to speak, downsize Kant's transcendental idealism, so that it ceases to conflict with Moore's realist Basic Assumption and sidesteps his criticism of perspectivism, then this would be an attractive strategy. There is an obvious impediment, however, for even on a 'modest' metaphilosophical construal, Kant is committed to forms of synthetic a priori knowledge that Moore argues to be unaccountable on Kant's own terms. Moreover, even if Kant does not *construct* transcendental idealism under the abstract description employed by Moore, still it is very plausible that it *satisfies* Moore's description, which is all that his critical purposes require.

Let it be agreed, then, that Kant's defender is bound to engage with Moore at his 'stratospheric' level. Still, it does not follow that Moore's construal of transcendental idealism must be accepted.

Here is an alternative: *Moore's criticism is based on a misconstrual of Kant's transcendental idealism. Transcendental idealism is not in essence the thesis that all representation is perspectival. Rather it is the thesis that the form of experience is imposed.*<sup>20</sup> *This thesis asserts a necessity, but it does not draw a limit to sense; so it is not self-stultifying in the manner of the thesis attacked by Moore.*<sup>21</sup>

That the notion of imposition is central to transcendental idealism, no less so than perspectival, is highly plausible, but again Moore's criticism seem not to have been deflected. In the first place, the impositionalist form of transcendental idealism avoids Moore's criticism only so long as it says nothing about the thing in itself.<sup>22</sup> Second, it involves once again a claim to knowledge, viz. of the form of experience itself, which Moore maintains is unsustainable. Third, though impositionalism may not employ the language of perspective, it is not free of perspectival in the way demanded by Moore's Basic Assumption. Whether or not the form of experience admits of alternatives, and so can be considered one perspective among many, the notion of perspective is kept in play, in so far as the form (i) is originally subjective, i.e. imposed and not discovered (the objectual order that it projects is of a kind that *could not* have been discovered and *could only* have been imposed), and (ii) is that to which objects are indexed and by reference to which their basic formal features are explained. These conditions collide with the Basic Assumption: if the form of experience, as the vehicle by which we arrive at our cognitive target, also enters into *what is there*, then it does not take us to what is there *anyway*. An epistemic medium that functions in this way deserves the title of a perspective.

There is then, I think, little choice but to accept Moore's terms of argument. In which case, the following might be ventured: *Moore is right to identify transcendental idealism with the thesis that all representation is perspectival, but his charge of incoherence rests on a false picture of how we achieve knowledge of perspectival. Moore's account of perspectival rests on his Basic Assumption. As Moore conceives our epistemic situation, the natural attitude represents itself as absolute, and perspectival enters at a reflective, theoretical level: in the natural attitude we naively take our representations of the world to be absolute, and it is only under the pressure of reflection that we are moved to revise this natural assumption. Perspectival is thus defined originally by Moore as a failure to achieve absoluteness, an epistemic privation. But what if knowledge of perspectival were primitive, in the very way that Moore claims that his Basic Assumption is primitive? If that were so, then the perspectival asserted in transcendental idealism should be identified with the fact that there is such a thing as (what we may call) the basic shape of cognition. How this notion of transcendental shape might be elaborated is a further matter. The important point for present purposes is that, if this is what the perspectival affirmed in transcendental idealism consists in, then transcendental idealism does not rest on any drawing of limits, and is not self-stultifying, for we do not need to get outside ourselves and occupy a perspective-free standpoint, in order to apprehend our perspectival; we have aboriginal knowledge of it from the inside.*

This formulation, though at a distance from Kant's explicit statements of transcendental idealism, has nonetheless a good claim to the title, and it is not hard to think of historical instances of thinkers who have sought to explicate it in such terms: Reinhold, J. S. Beck and Fichte among Kant's contemporaries, and at least some of the phenomenologists.<sup>23</sup> Aspects of the shape of cognition by virtue of which it constitutes a perspective will plausibly include the following basic facts: that cognition stretches out between its subject and object poles, that it involves a domain of presentation or cognitive 'field of vision' which is not itself an object but a condition for objects, that the subject to whom objects are presented cannot be presented to itself in the way that objects are presented to it, that the domain of presentation must order its contents but that this order cannot emanate directly from its contents, and so on.<sup>24</sup>

I propose, then, to identify transcendental idealism for present purposes with the thesis that the objects of our cognition owe their form to a structure of which we are the source and which constitutes our perspective on the objectual world. If it can be agreed that this is *prima facie* plausible as a way of capturing what is distinctive of Kant's idealism, and that it reflects the understanding of Kant's doctrine which has been historically influential, then the argument with

Moore comes down, I suggest, to two main points. Does the assertion of perspectivalty contradict the Basic Assumption so bluntly as to put transcendental idealism beyond the pale? And is the claim to knowledge of the perspective-affording, object-conditioning structure of experience problematic in the way that Moore claims? I will take these in turn.

It is clearly important that transcendental idealism should not simply repudiate the datum which the Basic Assumption claims to articulate – to do so would be to collapse Kant's doctrine into something like Nietzsche's perspectivism, under its more fiercely anti-realist construals.<sup>25</sup> But it is not at all obvious that transcendental idealism cannot conserve enough of the Basic Assumption to keep ontological nihilism at a safe distance. Transcendental idealism denies that there can be absolute representations in so far as these are representations of 'what is there *anyway*', where 'anyway' means 'independently of the form of experience', but it can affirm (i) that there are absolute representations in the sense of representations of the invariant and exceptionless objectual order which results from the imposition of the form of experience; and (ii) that our representations are of what is there *anyway* in so far as 'anyway' means 'satisfying the conditions of objectivity dictated by the form of experience'. Moore of course rejects the transcendental idealist's understanding of 'absolute' and 'anyway' in terms of the form of experience. This, however, alerts us to the possibility that Moore's Basic Assumption is philosophically substantial, and not a simple recapitulation of the realism of the natural attitude. For the transcendental idealist may argue: Since natural consciousness has no notion of the form of experience, as the transcendental philosopher understands that concept, the realism of natural consciousness cannot contain the thought, or rest on the assumption, that the reality of things is *not* owed to the form of experience; therefore Moore must either show that this claim – the claim that the substantial reality with which we are confronted *could not owe anything* to our subjectivity – is in fact contained, implicitly, within natural consciousness, or provide an independent argument for it (consistent with the claim to Basicness). Now at this point it is not clear how the disagreement between Moore and the transcendental idealist concerning the interpretation of natural consciousness is to be resolved, nor which way the arguments will go, but the burden of argument has been redistributed, and the immediate threat – the worry that transcendental idealism throws reality to the wind – has been met.

Regarding the other question: Moore grants that the initial threat of contradiction – asserted in the Limit Argument – can be avoided by means of the thick/thin distinction. Contradiction returns at a second stage, however, according to Moore, because transcendental idealism's sense-making must be *both* thick *and* thin. There would no contradiction, however, if transcendental sense-making were *neither* thick *nor* thin but of some third kind – 'sense-making of a singular kind', as Moore himself puts it. So the question is simply: Why should transcendental conditions *not* lay claim to a singular status? It is not at all obvious, from their original definitions, that thick and thin provide an exhaustive classification of cognitions. Moore says that 'we do not in the end know how to regard it' and that it involves a 'step back from the human standpoint'.<sup>26</sup> And it is here surely that the nub of the issue lies: Can the transcendental idealist say enough about what distinguishes transcendental sense-making to make it plausible that it is neither thick (in the manner of empirical cognition) nor thin (in the manner of our thinking of things in themselves)? My own feeling is that the question can be answered with a resounding Yes. By exposing the notion of transcendental logic, showing the distinctiveness of transcendental *explananda*, and highlighting the differences of transcendental proof from other forms of justification, and of transcendental analysis from other forms of explanation, it can be shown that we *do* know how to regard it. From this it will emerge that a step *back* is indeed taken in transcendental reflection, but not a step *out* of the human standpoint; transcendental philosophy can regard itself as the self-reflection of the human standpoint, and claim a transcendence of natural consciousness, without pretending to independence from it. All of this involves the introduction of a panoply of new concepts and raises questions that must at some point be addressed – in what sense is knowledge of transcendental necessity self-knowledge? do transcendental necessities have ontological underpinnings? is their realization in any sense a psychological matter? – but that goes with the territory: in Moore's terms, transcendental philosophy is engaged in concept creation.

The following may help to allay the suspicion that transcendental sense-making disguises an incoherent superimposition. Consider what is involved in a standard Kantian transcendental condition. There is, on the one side, the *necessity itself*, that objects have (be given as having, be taken to have, be synthesized in accordance with) such and such a form; and on the other side, there is the *ground* of this necessity, which Kant locates in a faculty. Our knowledge of the former is 'thick', in the sense that there can be nothing more to a transcendental necessity than what we can grasp of it; and our knowledge of the latter is 'thin', in so far as we have no insight into the constitution of our cognitive powers and can identify them solely by way of their transcendental functional role. There is, then, as Moore says, a combination of thinness and thickness, but it appears entirely coherent: we know our perspective *qua* its properties of shaping objects, but we do not know its ground; we know the point of view that determines our perspective *qua* its object-conditioning force, but not in itself, not in abstraction from how it conditions cognition.

Once the transcendental idealist has rebutted the charge of incoherence, a new wave of debate can begin. The transcendental idealist may now introduce a set of considerations which have so far been held to one side, concerning the problem-solving, explanatory and other virtues of transcendental idealism. A lot falls under this heading, but the issue to focus on above all in the present context is the solution that transcendental idealism claims to give to the problem of objective knowledge – its account of the basic possibility of mind-world fit,<sup>27</sup> and the protection that it offers against skeptical challenges; matters which may well be thought to pose serious difficulties for Moore's realism.

It may yet be that, even when the case for transcendental idealism has been put in the strongest possible terms, and its formal coherence, explanatory power and epistemological virtues have all been accepted, some epistemological (or axiological?) gut instinct prevents us from giving up the Basic Assumption, the irresistible sense of inclusion in a sublimely transcendent reality. But if so, then we have not a victory for realism, or the collapse of transcendental idealism, but rather an antinomy (transcendental idealism vs. transcendental realism). Moore's account allows it to be dissolved by reconstruing transcendental idealism as privileged nonsense. The transcendental idealist will ask why, if the antinomy cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of both parties and its solution must therefore be one-sided, it must go Moore's way.

One last point. I hope to have indicated grounds on which, as I said at the outset, the case against transcendental idealism may be re-opened. This is entirely consistent with taking transcendental idealism and its problems – in particular its rub with the Basic Assumption, the antinomy that it forms with transcendental realism – as setting an agenda for late modern philosophy. In other words, it seems to me that the historical narrative of *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics* does not require the categorial verdict on transcendental idealism which Moore has carried over from *Points of View*. In fact, what I will suggest in the next section is that a weaker verdict on transcendental idealism would have served Moore's historical purposes slightly better.

### **Moore's historical narrative: German Idealism**

That dissatisfaction with Kant propels much of the subsequent development of metaphysics, and that it has much to do with the perceived difficulties of Kant's idealism, is a matter of hard historical fact, and to that extent Moore is no doubt right to put Kant's problems bang at the centre of his historical story. That said, it seems to me that the historical record does not bear out Moore's specific, strong criticism of Kant's doctrine, and that in order to locate a post-Kantian development that does agree with Moore concerning the paradoxicality of transcendental idealism, it is necessary to look further afield than *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*, which restricts consideration of the post-Kantian development to Fichte and Hegel.

As Moore rightly says, Fichte and Hegel neither plainly accept nor plainly reject Kant but rather attempt to '*work out*' what Kant has bequeathed,<sup>28</sup> and this involves, along with much else, a focus on the concept of the thing in itself and the notion of the limits of knowledge. The question I want to raise is this: To what extent does this working-out of Kant turn on the alleged self-stultification of transcendental idealism? It seems to me that for neither Fichte nor Hegel is this straightforwardly



the case. My remarks here will need to be very brief, and I will not pretend that they settle the matter.

The 1797 'First Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre' – I select this text because it contains perhaps Fichte's most lucid exposition and defence of his transcendental turn – presents the following argument. In §1 Fichte declares that the task of (theoretical) philosophy is to explain experience (or more exactly, the fact that some of our representations and not others are accompanied with the feeling of necessity which marks objectivity).<sup>29</sup> In §2 it is said that, in general, explanation, Erklärung, demands a ground which lies 'outside of what it grounds', entailing that philosophy must concern itself with a ground '*outside all experience*'.<sup>30</sup> The very task of philosophy may therefore seem to demand the transcendence which is denied by Critical philosophy, i.e., to require a 'dogmatic' solution. But in §§3–7 Fichte argues that, in fact, a solution consistent with Critical precepts can be provided, because reflection discovers something 'present within consciousness [im Bewusstseyn nachzuweisen ist]', which is not *as such* the explanatory ground of experience, but from which this ground, the 'Erklärungsgrund aller Erfahrung', can be extrapolated through abstraction: the philosopher is able to 'elevate himself above experience [er sich über die Erfahrung erheben könne]', because he 'stakes out a new region within his own consciousness [er legt gleichsam ein neues Gebiet in seinem Bewusstseyn an]'.<sup>31</sup>

All of this is presented by Fichte as Kant's own idealist teaching. On Fichte's account there is nothing awry in Kant's project of a transcendental theory, Fichte's view of which corresponds to the account I gave in the previous section – Fichte's claim of the philosopher's elevation *above* experience which nonetheless remains *within* consciousness (by extending it) is another formula for the partial transcendence that I attributed to Kant. Moore detects, as a powerful driving force in Fichte, a concern to rationalize transcendental idealism's claims to knowledge of the conditions of experience and its objects, but even here it is hard to see the Limit Argument, or any associated worry concerning the thinness/thickness of transcendental cognition, playing a role: what Fichte has on his mind is above all the problem of protecting transcendental claims against resurgent skepticism of the sort that Kantians had encountered in Schulze's blistering *Aenesidemus* review. When Fichte does level roughly the same sort of charge of self-stultification as Moore levels against Kant, it is directed against the dogmatist, and even then, the contexts are not ones where it is expected to turn argumentative wheels:<sup>32</sup> the important and effective criticisms that Fichte makes of dogmatism in the First Introduction centre instead on (a) its redundancy, given the availability of a non-transcendent explanation of experience (idealism), (b) the epistemic insecurity of its postulation of an explanatory ground lying altogether outside experience, and (c) the incongruity of dogmatism's conception of the subject with actual immediate self-experience and the freedom exhibited in self-consciousness.

With regard to Hegel, Moore's claim is again that a reaction to the perceived incoherence of transcendental idealism is at work. Here Moore is on stronger ground, and he supports his view with a compound quotation from §60 of the *Encyclopedia Logic*, the concluding section of Hegel's treatment of the Critical Philosophy. Here Hegel says that it is 'the supreme inconsistency' to regard cognition of the limits of the understanding as '*something absolute*', and in addition Hegel refers to the need to have the Unlimited '*on this side* within consciousness' in order to have knowledge of a limit.<sup>33</sup> This might seem clear evidence that Hegel subscribes to Moore's Limit Argument, but again I think that this is not the right interpretation. Consider the following paragraph, which comes from the beginning of the *Encyclopaedia Logic's* section on Critical Philosophy:

[T]he Critical Philosophy set itself the task of investigating just how far the forms of thinking are in general capable of helping us reach the cognition of truth. More precisely, the faculty of cognition was to be investigated before cognition began. This certainly involves the correct insight that the forms of thinking themselves must be made the object of cognition; but there soon creeps in, too, the mistaken project of wanting to have cognition before we have any cognition, or of not wanting to go into the water before we have learned to swim. Certainly, the forms of thinking should not be used without investigation; but this process of investigation is itself a process of cognition. So the activity of the forms of thinking, and the

critique of them, must be united within the process of cognition. The forms of thinking must be considered in and for themselves; they are the object and the activity of the object itself; they investigate themselves, [and] they must determine their own limits and point out their own defects.<sup>34</sup>

Here Hegel's complaint is not that Kant's scrutiny of our cognitive power is an incoherent undertaking or one that involves an impossible leap out of one's standpoint. (Had Hegel considered Kant's project contradictory in this way, then this would have been the place to say so.) Hegel does not even balk at the idea that thinking should 'determine [its] own limits' and defects. On the contrary, Critical philosophy is *right* to ask if 'the forms of thinking are in general capable of helping us reach the cognition of truth' – whence its superiority to the 'older metaphysics', which proceeds in naivety and consequently errs. Hegel's complaint is instead that Kant (i) subordinates the forms of thought to the antithesis of subjectivity/objectivity, (ii) fails to grasp that the forms of thinking are themselves already cognitions. In the sections that follow Hegel argues that no justification can be given for treating the categories, or the theory of transcendental conditions built around them, as inherently subjective, and indicates that reflection on the forms of thought must have the peculiar reflexive and dialectic character explicated in Hegel's *Logic*. In so far as Hegel imputes self-stultification to the Kantian project – wanting to learn to swim without getting into the water – this is a matter of its incapacity to realize the epistemological ends that it has set itself, not of logical incoherence. In sum, far from discovering a structural problem in Kant's project, Hegel endorses it, in order to divert it into absolute idealism.

When Hegel returns in §60 to Critical Philosophy's view of cognition, a lot has happened in the interim, and his remarks here must be set in context. Hegel has told us in §45 that 'to have established the finitude of the cognition that is based merely on experience and belongs to the understanding, and to have termed its content "appearance", was a very important result of the Kantian philosophy'.<sup>35</sup> Kant's thesis of the limits of knowledge is thus validated, albeit only in provisional form. What compels its superior reformulation – whereby it becomes Hegel's thesis of the confinement of *Verstand* to finitude – is the fact that Kant is *also* committed to Reason and 'the Idea'. The thrust of §60 is therefore that it is irrational of Kant to fail to 'bring two thoughts together'<sup>36</sup> in the way that Hegel recommends – the thoughts, both present in Kant, of the limited *Verstand* and the infinite *Vernunft*. In making this complaint Hegel is, inexplicitly but in accordance with his settled practice, anticipating the completed work of the *Logic*. For Hegel, Kant's 'supreme inconsistency' regarding cognition only comes into view once an *unbounded* idealism has been established, or at least projected, and so it cannot provide the motor for the latter's development;<sup>37</sup> just as, for Fichte, it is only when the standpoint of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is adopted, that the concept of the thing in itself comes to be seen as contradictory and is discharged from philosophical service. In short, for Hegel, Kant's transcendental idealism, and for Fichte, Kant's formulation thereof, come to appear self-frustrating only in retrospect, that is, from a higher idealist standpoint. The Limit Argument, it seems to me, is not used to reach that standpoint and does not supply the motive for seeking it.

I should make clear that Moore's view of the post-Kantian development is *not* that it turns uniquely on the Limit Argument, and that the chapters on Fichte and Hegel in no way downplay the complexity of the German Idealist development. The reason why I am nonetheless dwelling on the issue, and think it important to contest Moore's account of key moves in Fichte and Hegel as not just reflecting tensions in Kant (which is certainly the case) but as involving 'variations on the Limit Argument',<sup>38</sup> has to do with our understanding of the development of idealism after Kant. If Moore is right, then there is a structural incoherence in transcendental idealism so deep that it is hard to understand how Kant's idealist successors (who on Moore's account were not blind to the alleged incoherence) could have regarded his philosophy as holding promise<sup>39</sup> – on the face of it, the Limit Argument provides a *reductio ad absurdum* of the project of transcendental reflection.<sup>40</sup>

As I would instead see the historical development, it is in the following respect a story of continuity: the German Idealists embrace the project of transcendental reflection and do not regard Kant's thesis of the limits of human knowledge as contradictory, though certainly they regard Kant's transcendental idealism (or articulation thereof) as defective and thoroughly improvable. Crucially,

they *affirm* the element of transcendence in Kant's transcendental idealism which Moore finds problematic. Moore wants, if I understand him correctly, to view Fichte and Hegel as philosophers of immanence, who purge idealism of Kant's abortive movement of transcendence, and who to that extent veer towards Moore's own, negative, answer to the 'Transcendence Question' (the question whether there is 'scope for our making sense of "transcendent" things').<sup>41</sup> The opposition 'immanent/transcendent' has, as Moore notes, multiple senses,<sup>42</sup> and in many of these Fichte and Hegel are undoubtedly immanentist metaphysicians. What they both endorse unhesitatingly, however, is the capacity of philosophical reflection to grasp the 'Erklärungsgrund aller Erfahrung' through the use of forms of thought and modes of explanation which are alien to (in fact, on their own account, inversions of) ordinary consciousness, the natural attitude in which Moore's Basic Assumption is nested. Whether or not they carry transcendent ontological commitments, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and Hegel's speculative thinking comprise an *epistemic* transcendence of common sense as extreme as Spinoza's third form of knowledge. Unless this point is emphasized in the strongest terms, it seems to me, the German Idealist development is not intelligible.<sup>43</sup>

### **Philosophical aestheticism: Moore and the German Romantics**

If I am right, then Fichte and Hegel do not share Moore's view of the defects of Kant's transcendental idealism, and the fact that their responses to Kant do not bear out Moore's verdict is reflected in the fact that their forms of idealism do not go in the direction of Moore's own view of metaphysics. There is however one post-Kantian development which does agree with Moore to a remarkable extent concerning both the incoherence of transcendental idealism and the philosophical reorientation which it mandates, and this is early German Romanticism (under which heading I here include just two philosophers, Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel).

The parallel I want to draw here rests on two key points. One is the shared view that the Copernican revolution, though it represents a decisive and absolutely necessary development in the history of philosophy, fails to achieve coherence, not on account of any remediable defect in its formulation but because the basic shape of Kantianism fails to make sense. The second is the shared view that an aesthetic turn is directly necessary in light of its incoherence – the notion that a reorientation of philosophy in a quasi-aesthetic direction represents the proper response to the realization that transcendental idealism is incoherent. That the same broad movement of thought which provides the overall narrative arc of Moore's book – away from Kant and towards the aesthetic – should have been rehearsed at such an early point in the post-Kantian development is striking, and German Romanticism may be taken (in a way that, I have suggested, Fichte and Hegel should not be taken) as a historical instantiation of Moore's criticism of transcendental idealism.

Let me expand, briefly, on the relevant claims of the German Romantics. As regards their critique of transcendental idealism, there is the initial complication that Novalis and Schlegel elaborate their views primarily in response to Fichte, not Kant. This does not however affect the parallel I am proposing with Moore, since in the eyes of the German Romantics, Kant and Fichte effectively form two stages of a single philosophical project, the problems of Fichte being those of transcendental idealism at a higher stage of development: Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* displays in magnified form structural problems inherent in Kant's original transcendental idealist undertaking, and the failure of the *Wissenschaftslehre* shows the impossibility of reworking it in a way that would allow those problems to be solved.

The underlying problem with transcendental idealism, according to Novalis and Schlegel, has to do, as it does for Moore, with the infinite. One of the issues discussed most intensively in the 1790s concerned the possibility of providing a 'single first principle' for Kant's system. The German Romantics devote attention to this question, accepting that it provides an appropriate starting-point for determining the strengths and weaknesses of Kantianism, but in their view it does not get to the heart of the matter: the absence of a single first principle is merely symptomatic of, and downstream from, the more fundamental problem afflicting Kantianism, which lies in the contradiction between the *necessity* of grasping the infinite in order to complete the task that transcendental philosophy sets itself, and the *impossibility* of doing so. The German Romantics' interest in the infinite is a robustly philosophical and not a merely passionate matter: following Kant,

they consider aspiration to the unconditioned non-optional for human reason, and following Fichte, they consider unconditioned foundations a requisite of a philosophical system. In this light the German Romantics may be regarded as diagnostically a step ahead of those of their contemporaries who also despaired of the possibility of a single principle, but who in response turned to a common sense based version of the Critical philosophy, substituting the inertia of the *gemeinen Verstand* for the rational fixity of a scientific principle.

Karl Ameriks has pointed to the way in which, immediately after Kant, his defenders turn to what Ameriks calls 'short arguments' for transcendental idealism,<sup>44</sup> meaning not necessarily arguments that can be briefly stated, but arguments that appeal to the bare concepts of reality and representation in order to establish transcendental idealism, in place of the complex routes taken by Kant in the Transcendental Aesthetic and Antinomy of Pure Reason, involving multiple premises, concerned with specific topics such as space and time. The German Romantics conform to this pattern but in reverse, presenting – as does Moore – a 'short argument' *against* the coherence of transcendental idealism. Novalis states the premise in his famous assertion: 'We everywhere seek the unconditioned, and only ever find things [Wir suchen überall das Unbedingte, und finden immer nur Dinge].'<sup>45</sup> That positive cognition is restricted to mere *Dinge* is of course Kant's own conclusion, but Novalis turns it against transcendental idealism: *only if* positive cognition of the unconditioned were possible, could there be cognition of the 'absolute ground', as Novalis calls it, which is what alone would allow us to (in Moore's terminology) make sense of our sense-making of *Dinge*, that is, allow us to affirm transcendental idealism.<sup>46</sup> But – Fichte having failed in the endeavour to rescue Kantianism from incoherence by extending philosophical cognition to the unconditioned<sup>47</sup> – Kant's conclusion that positive cognition of the unconditioned is impossible stands unrefuted, and it undercuts the transcendental project. Schlegel takes this result to define the situation of philosophy: idealism, first in Kant's form and then in Fichte's, fails to cognize the infinite, and what is left is *Geist*, consciousness of our own cognitively purposive, infinite-seeking thought-activity.<sup>48</sup>

The problem-situation of German Romanticism consists, then, in their affirmation of, on the one hand, the necessity of metaphysics – meaning of course post-Critical metaphysics – and on the other hand, the absolute impossibility of completing the task defined by Kantianism. What, then, do the German Romantics suggest? How should the post-Kantian philosopher respond to this predicament? Here, in the form of an unsorted list, are the main proposals which we find in Novalis and Schlegel:

1. *Infinite approximation*. Philosophy as an incomplete and uncompletable progression, expressing a striving for the infinite: '*Philosophy is infinite* [...] the most complete system can only be *approximation*.' '*The form of philosophy is infinite*.'<sup>49</sup>
2. *Irony, paradox, antinomy, anti-systematic systematicity*. 'It is equally fatal for one's spirit to have a system as to not have one. One must therefore decide to combine the two.'<sup>50</sup> 'Irony is the form of paradox. Paradox is everything simultaneously good and great.'<sup>51</sup> 'If one is ever besotted with the absolute and simply cannot escape it, then the only way out is to contradict oneself continually and join opposite extremes together.'<sup>52</sup> 'An idea is a concept perfected to the point of irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts.'<sup>53</sup> '*The form of philosophy is absolute unity*. We are not talking here of the unity of a system [...] As soon as something becomes systematic, it is not absolute. Absolute unity would instead be a chaos of systems.'<sup>54</sup>
3. *Symbolic cognition*. '*All cognition is symbolic* [...] Only symbolically can Ideas be expressed.'<sup>55</sup>
4. *Transcendental poetry*. 'Whatever can be done while poetry and philosophy are separated has been done and accomplished. So the time has come to unite the two.'<sup>56</sup> 'Transcendental poetry is a mixture of philosophy and poetry. It really embraces all transcendental functions, indeed it comprises the transcendental altogether. The transcendental poet is the transcendental person altogether.'<sup>57</sup>
5. *Historicization of philosophy*. '[T]he results of idealism for the philosophy of philosophy may be resolved into the following: *that philosophy must be entirely historical* [...] Our philosophy is itself history [...] History and philosophy are one and the same [...] Philosophy must present the whole; but it can do so only indirectly.'<sup>58</sup>

The picture is not tidy, but what loosely unifies these various proposals is the notion that metaphysics should abandon its aim of grasping truth directly, accept the impossibility of finality and systematic completeness, identify itself with a creative process or type of activity rather than a product thereof, and unite itself with artistic production, meaning (among other things) that our doxastic attitude to philosophical claims should cease to be one of plain belief – judgemental affirmation of propositions – and become something more like aesthetic appreciation. This is the redirection of *spirit* which becomes appropriate after we have abandoned the (inadequate) *letter* of transcendental idealism: 'Everything delivered in propositions and inferences is merely the letter, which must be surpassed in so far as only the spirit [*Geist*] remains.'<sup>59</sup> And it is entirely sufficient, Novalis and Schelling believe, to prevent our descent into a normative abyss: with the right aesthetically informed strategies, all that we need can be teased out of our feeling for the infinite.

The general tenor and overall vector of these proposals resonate with what Moore says about non-propositional sense-making. Of particular note is the fifth proposal, which is worked out at some length in Schlegel's genetic reconstruction of the history of philosophy.<sup>60</sup> Schlegel explains how the systematic architecture of philosophical positions may be thought to grow out of subjective conditions, the various different needs of philosophical reflection, and how the history of philosophy can be read as a movement of thought which arrives at no final System but nonetheless achieves a kind of completeness.<sup>61</sup> Schlegel's idea is that in apprehending this systematic-historical whole we are presented, indirectly and obliquely, with the metaphysical whole that philosophy attempts to grasp, and this, I take it, is a prime instance of non-propositional sense-making (as is *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics* itself *qua* hermeneutic of the history of philosophy).

However, the parallel holds only up to a point, and I want to end this short supplement to Moore's historical narrative by pointing out an important difference between the German Romantic response to the incoherence of transcendental idealism and the one described by Moore.

Moore thinks that transcendental idealism is a necessary product of philosophical reason which, though incoherent, incorporates an insight that should not be allowed to fade and that is best preserved through the category of the aesthetic. The aesthetic dimension enters for Moore not in the first instance at the level of first-order philosophical activity, but at a metaphilosophical level, in our understanding of the nature of metaphysics: Moore reconstrues metaphysical reflection as itself having *already* an aesthetic character and as *on that very count* possessing its own type of validity. This allows us to carry on thinking (if not asserting) transcendental idealism, on the condition that we understand this activity as something like the contemplation of a work of art. The German Romantics, by contrast, having grasped that the ambition of philosophy is unfulfillable, demand first-order revisions of philosophical practice: philosophical discourse is to be united with artistic activity in forging new 'symbols', *Darstellung* is to take the place of *Wissen*, and the ground rules of philosophical reflection are to be altered in such a way that thought no longer aims at plain consistency but rather at the systematic multiplication of antinomies, giving occasion for irony, the new doxastic target. Moore's standpoint is, in comparison, conservative: it does not preclude artistic modes of philosophical practice, but nor does it require philosophy to make itself aesthetic; it allows philosophy to take new forms, without any devaluation of its traditional forms. In addition, Moore's account helps us to understand why it may be purposive to aim at antinomy in philosophical reflection, why irony may be taken as a mark of epistemic success, and so on – in other words, why, *contra* Hegel, the romanticization of philosophy is not a disguised way of giving up on the philosophical enterprise, and does not subjectivize thought to the point of self-destruction. It is a mark of the subtlety and sophistication of Moore's philosophical position, and of the depth of the lessons that Moore has drawn from the history of modern philosophy, that in the perspective of *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics* so much sense may be made of so much of the history of philosophy.

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## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics* [EMM], p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> The Basic Assumption is not equivalent to an affirmation that any of our current objects of cognition are things in themselves; it merely affirms the possibility of our having or acquiring such knowledge. Moore envisages here a connection with physical science, but of an indeterminate kind: see *PoV* Ch. 4, §4 (pp. 74–76), and Moore 2011, pp. 52–53.

<sup>4</sup> *PoV*, Ch. 6, §1, pp. 119–120; see also Ch. 5, §8, pp. 112–113; and Ch. 6, §2, pp. 125–126.

<sup>5</sup> *PoV*, Ch. 6, §4, p. 137. Here is a parallel passage from *EMM*, which focusses on the *conative* aspect of transcendental idealism's self-stultification: 'Transcendental idealism [...] is designed to suppress our aspirations to make sense of what is transcendent, on the grounds that such a thing is impossible. Yet precisely in drawing our attention to what is transcendent, and signalling it as that whereof we should not try to make sense, it entices us to do the very thing that it is designed to stop us from trying to do; and, worse still, it requires that we do that very thing in order to assimilate it (transcendental idealism) in the first place' (*EMM*, p. 166).

<sup>6</sup> *PoV*, p. 202.

<sup>7</sup> See *PoV*, Chs. 7–10.

<sup>8</sup> The connection of finitude with the ineffable is stated briefly in Moore 1992: human finitude, in conjunction with our aspiration to the infinite, 'gives rise to ineffability' (p. 432); we desire to play God, which is what makes us *try* to put all insights into words. At greater length, see *PoV*, Ch. 11, Moore 2001, Ch. 15, and Moore 2003.

<sup>9</sup> *EMM*, p. 135.

<sup>10</sup> *EMM*, p. 138.

<sup>11</sup> *EMM*, pp. 138–139.

<sup>12</sup> *EMM*, pp. 139–140.

<sup>13</sup> A third such problematic claim in Kant is added in the chapter on Fichte: the existence of the subject is again both too thick and too thin, and again 'by his [Kant's] own very lights, makes no real sense to us' (*EMM*, p. 151–152). A further instance is described in Moore 2011, p. 52: 'I cannot entertain the thought that my thinking is answerable only to my phenomenal bubble without having a thought that is answerable to more than my phenomenal bubble.'

<sup>14</sup> *EMM*, p. 140.

<sup>15</sup> Comparisons of metaphysics with art are drawn at *EMM*, p. 254 (the *Tractatus*) and p. 492 (*Being and Time*). Heidegger's own realignment of metaphysics with poetry is discussed in *EMM*, pp. 479–484.

<sup>16</sup> *EMM*, pp. 581–582.

<sup>17</sup> *EMM*, p. 583.

<sup>18</sup> *EMM*, p. 590.

<sup>19</sup> See Ameriks 2003.

<sup>20</sup> 'Imposed' may seem to carry objectionable, transcendental-psychological connotations, but it is intended just as an unequivocal expression of the Copernican idea that objects derive their form from the subject.

<sup>21</sup> See Sacks 1999, p. 383. Sacks defends transcendental idealism against Moore's critique in *PoV*. I draw on Sacks throughout this section, but what I propose departs from his account, since Sacks dispenses with the notion of perspective and articulates transcendental idealism solely in terms of imposition. This allows Moore to claim, in his reply to Sacks, that he has no quarrel with Sacks' transcendental idealism, which he says does not contradict the Basic Assumption (Moore 1999). At this point it has become, it seems to me, rather difficult to grasp what is at issue – due, I think, to Moore's condition (*PoV*, pp. 9–14, 282), which Sacks accepts at least for the sake of argument, that an outlook is perspectival only if it admits of, and excludes, alternatives (I return to this below). One fascinating theme which surfaces in this exchange concerns Moore's quasi-ethical characterization of transcendental idealism as immodest (see Moore 1992, p. 433, 1997, pp. 274–278), which Sacks counters with the suggestion that Moore's realism may have its own hubristic aspect (Sacks 1999, p. 385). What this seems to suggest is the impossibility of overcoming (fixing) the constitutive hubris of the philosophical project through any epistemological or metaphysical doctrine (a premise and lesson of Kierkegaard, perhaps).

<sup>22</sup> More precisely: only on the condition that it treats the concept of the thing in itself as merely heuristic or polemical.

<sup>23</sup> To take one relatively clear instance, Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* seeks to show that 'objective thought' – his term for what Moore calls absolute representations – presuppose and are conditioned by pre-reflective consciousness of intrinsically perspectival 'pre-objective being'.

<sup>24</sup> See Sacks 2003, Ch. 8.

<sup>25</sup> In his subtle discussion of Nietzsche's perspectivism in *EEM*, pp. 379–383, Moore denies that it is self-refuting. The condition of its (fragile) coherence is that it abjures the Basic Assumption (which provides the real objection to it: pp. 379n19, and 383n34; see also *PoV*, pp. 107–109).

<sup>26</sup> *EMM*, pp. 140 and 139.

<sup>27</sup> As Moore acknowledges: see *PoV*, pp. 118–119.

<sup>28</sup> *EMM*, p. 144.

<sup>29</sup> Fichte 1994, pp. 8–9 (423).

<sup>30</sup> Fichte 1994, p. 9 (424–425).

<sup>31</sup> Fichte 1994, pp. 10–12 (425–426), p. 14 (428), p. 15 (430), p. 33–34 (448–449).

<sup>32</sup> Two such passages are quoted in *EEM*, p. 154. Moore notes that Fichte does not see his 'variation of the Limit Argument' as 'anti-Kantian' but rather as anti-dogmatic (*EMM*, pp. 154–155). What I doubt is that Fichte puts weight on Moore's Limit Argument, or put differently, that Fichte's arguments are truly 'variations' thereof. (1) The first of the two passages cited by Moore, from *The Vocation of Man* (Fichte 1956, p. 74), declares that the attempt to 'conceive of an absolute connection between things *in themselves* and the I *in itself* involves a forgetfulness of one's own act of thinking. Rhetorical gestures are characteristic of this essentially popular presentation of his philosophy, where Fichte allows himself to be read as a Berkeleyan phenomenalist, but the substantial point is that if Fichte is not here simply transposing Berkeley's argument from the sphere of perception to that of thought – which would not qualify in Moore's terms as a Limit Argument – then it is because the absurdity Fichte alleges is indexed (the context indicates) to the task of an *internal elucidation* of the givenness of objects. Fichte's point is specific: in so far as my *relation* to the object is *given* in and with my consciousness of the object, it cannot be identified with any state of affairs

defined independently of the possibility of consciousness. (2) I read the second passage – from §8 of the Second Introduction, a point late in the text where Fichte has done the main work of establishing the *Wissenschaftslehre* and is wrapping up – as indicating only how dogmatism may (must) be viewed *once we have grasped* that 'one cannot abstract from the I' (Fichte 1994, p. 86; 500–501). Fichte makes it clear that the contradiction emerges *only when* the correct lesson has been drawn from the Kantian 'I think'; it is not presented as an *argument for* transcendental idealism.

<sup>33</sup> *EMM*, pp. 164–165.

<sup>34</sup> Hegel 1991, p. 82; §41, Z1.

<sup>35</sup> Hegel 1991, p. 88.

<sup>36</sup> Hegel 1991, p. 105.

<sup>37</sup> Hegel's statement about limits in §60 also, I think, reads differently in context (Hegel 1991, pp. 105–107). Hegel does not make any general logical or epistemological claim here. He is concerned with the (felt) *experience* of limitation in *natural* beings. His claim is that there can be a *natural* experience of a limitation of *cognition* only when the knowing creature goes in conception 'beyond' what limits it. Kant has provided for this experience through his account of man's natural use of his reason as implicating Ideas. Hegel is thus not making a criticism of Kant's transcendental idealism but again endorsing it, as far as it goes; the criticism is that it does not go far enough, for by Kant's own lights, natural reason's experience of cognitive limitation should be taken – like all experiences of natural limitation – as licensing and prompting an effort at its supersession. Hegel is, as it were, imputing a kind of philosophical perversity to Kant: Kant *could* do more, for he has all the requisite materials to hand, but arbitrarily chooses to turn his spade. This is not an instance of the Limit Argument. The pragmatic character of Hegel's critical perspective here on Kant is underlined in the paragraph that follows, which says that, because Kant declines to go further, he cannot hope to *improve* scientific cognition. Kant's pragmatic (as opposed to logical) inconsistency is brought out in the final paragraph, which notes that Kant, in stark contrast with materialist-naturalist successors to empiricism, accords *authority* and *independence* to reason, meaning that Kant is perfectly positioned to do, what he declines to do.

<sup>38</sup> *EEM*, p. 154 and p. 164.

<sup>39</sup> Several contemporaries did explicitly charge Kant with the sort of deep contradiction alleged by Moore, and accordingly rejected transcendental philosophy wholesale: Jacobi argued that transcendental idealism (like all *wissenschaftlich* philosophy) annuls itself, precipitating a turn to *Glaube*; Eberhard argued that Kantian philosophy avoids contradiction (it says that it confines itself to the human understanding, yet cannot dispense with appeal to eternal truths) only if it resolves itself back into Leibnizianism.

<sup>40</sup> If limits to knowledge are unthinkable, then the elevation in reflection by virtue of which they come to appear thinkable, whether or not provable, must be faulty; it must contain proto-contradictory elements. At *EEM*, p. 141, Moore says that it is 'too soon to say where the fault lies. Perhaps Kant has not systematized his results properly [...]'; but I do not see why, if Moore is right, it is not already game over.

<sup>41</sup> *EMM*, p. 9; Moore gives his answer on pp. 15–16. Fichte is described as showing that 'within the security of our unprincipled choice [of transcendentalism], everything makes sense' (*EMM*, p. 159; see pp. 155–159). Hegel is categorized as an 'empirical idealist' (*EMM*, p. 167) – following Moore's unconventional definition of the term as one who holds that the dependence relation can be made sense of in the same terms as its worldly relatum (p. 142) – and as a naturalist (p. 190).

<sup>42</sup> *EMM*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>43</sup> To expand this last point. The German Idealists are unquestionably dissatisfied with, and seek to push back, the limits of Kantianism. Their endeavours include the balancing out of transcendental idealism with a correlative realism which is not merely the 'empirical realism' of Kantian appearance (Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and *Real-Idealismus*), the retrieval of large quantities of pre-Kantian metaphysics (Spinoza, Leibniz, Plato, Aristotle), and either the absolutization of practical reason (Fichte) or a restoration of pure reason in its theoretical employment (Schelling and Hegel). In order for these measures to not count as either pre-Critical regressions or confused amalgamations of Kant's philosophy with earlier philosophy, Kant must be taken to have made available an epistemological capacity that his own metaphysics fail to exploit fully. In other words, German Idealism's transcendence of Kant's transcendental idealism, and its fusion of Kantian with early modern and ancient metaphysics, is indeed engaged closely with the issue of absolute *vs.* perspectival representation that concerns Moore, but the Kantian foundations of the whole undertaking require that Kant's epistemic transcendence of the natural attitude – which is what Moore rejects – be taken as successful.

<sup>44</sup> See Ameriks 2003, Ch. 5.



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- <sup>45</sup> Novalis 1997, p. 23 (translation modified).
- <sup>46</sup> Novalis 2003, pp. 167–168, no. 566.
- <sup>47</sup> See Novalis' *Fichte Studies* (2003).
- <sup>48</sup> Schlegel 1991a, and Schlegel 1846, pp. 280–291.
- <sup>49</sup> Schlegel 1991a, pp. 10, 93.
- <sup>50</sup> Schlegel 1991b, p. 24, no. 53 (translation modified).
- <sup>51</sup> Schlegel 1991b, p. 6, no. 48.
- <sup>52</sup> Schlegel 1991b, p. 17, no. 3 (translation modified).
- <sup>53</sup> Schlegel 1991b, p. 33, no. 121.
- <sup>54</sup> Schlegel 1991a, p. 5.
- <sup>55</sup> Schlegel 1991a, p. 9.
- <sup>56</sup> Schlegel 1991b, p. 104, no. 108.
- <sup>57</sup> Novalis 1997, p. 56, no. 41.
- <sup>58</sup> Schlegel 1991a, p. 93.
- <sup>59</sup> Schlegel 1991a, p. 95.
- <sup>60</sup> Schlegel 1846.
- <sup>61</sup> Schlegel 1991a, pp. 11–14.