Transcendentalism as a Special Type of Philosophizing and the Transcendental Paradigm of Philosophy

«Only the revival of Kant's transcendentalism can be an [possible] outlet for contemporary philosophy»

Alexander Ogurtsov

Abstract. In the paper we have attempted to consider Kant's transcendental philosophy as a special type of philosophizing and the new transcendental paradigm, which differs from both the 'object' metaphysics of Antiquity and 'subject' metaphysics of the Modern Age (transcendent — transcendental — immanent metaphysics). For this purpose we shall introduce methodological terms 'transcendental shift' and 'transcendental perspective'. The basis for such representation of transcendentalism is the cognitive and semantic reading of the Critique and theory of 'two aspects'. While in classical metaphysics cognition is interpreted as a relation between empirical subject and object, in transcendental metaphysics (perspective) 'possible experience' (Erfahrung) shall be understood as a relation between 'consciousness generally' (transcendental subject) and 'thing-in-general' (transcendental object). In this, Kant's transcendentalism in contrast to classical contemplative metaphysics acts as an 'experimental' metaphysics and the transcendentality is defined as the intermediate between the immanent and transcendent ontological area (as a "instrumental" component of our cognition).

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In the second half of the XXth century the second (after Neo-Kantianism) 'discovery' of Kant, associated with conceptual change in the understanding of transcendentalism — the transition from the traditional ontological theory of "two worlds" to the theory of "two aspects" (Rohlf, 2010) based on epistemic reading of Critique, arises. In this regard, R.Hanna writes that the development of contemporary philosophy (in the face of two major traditions: analytic and continental) is largely predetermined by Kant's transcendentalism, and the XXth century may be named as the post-Kantian century (Hanna, 2007); M.Foucault echoes him and says that Kant "stands at the beginning of a new method of philosophizing" (inaugural lecture «L'Ordre du discours», 1970); A. Ogurtsov emphasizes that only the revival of transcendentalism (as the "removal" of the alternative of naturalism («Back to things!») and constructivism («All is our construction!») can be the outlet for the contemporary philosophy/philosophy of science (see epigraph; Ogurtsov, 2011).

This allows us to consider Kant's transcendentalism not just as one of the particular philosophical theory, but as the basis of a new — transcendental — paradigm of philosophy (philosophizing).

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As the starting point for our interpretation of the transcendentalism we take the classical paradigm of epistemology, for which the main question is the relation of a subject to an object what can be represented in binary scheme S(subject) – O(object). On this scale, we also mark the result of our knowledge or the interaction between the subject (S) and the object (O) in the process of cognition – the experience (or experienced knowledge; Ger. 'Erfahrung')\(^1\), which is located in the middle of the scale. In this case the original binary scheme turns into a ternary one: S — Erfahrung — O.

According to key [KrV, B 25] of Critique, where transcendental philosophy (TrPh) is defined as «...knowledge which is not so much occupied with objects as with the mode of our cognition of these objects, so far as this mode of cognition is possible a priori»\(^2\), the transition to transcendentalism is based on transcendental ‘shift’ from [empirical] studies of the objects.

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1 Kant equates Erfahrung and Empirische Erkenntnis [KrV,B147–8].
2 Or: "... but with our mode (manner) of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible a priori".
(things) to the right side of the scale in the direction to the subject, but rather into the intermediate between subject and object area of experienced knowledge, — which is the area of the transcendentality.

The comparison of the transcendental with the empirical or the distinction between empirical and transcendental perspectives (Allison, 2004) is crucial for the understanding of the transcendentality. If empirical perspective believes the knowledge we receive to be the result of affection of our sensibility, the transcendental perspective believes the knowledge to be the result of our faculty of cognition.

However, the transcendental shift Kant postulated is not fully defined and refers to the interval of the possible transcendental arrangement on the right side of the scale between objective experience and the subjective content of our consciousness. Accordingly, there may be distinct interpretations of the transcendental (resp. transcendentality).

Historically first, but not according to the spirit of Kant's transcendentalism, is the ‘Göttingen’ interpretation (Gavre, Feder, later Yakobi), which could be called the theory of "two objects" or "two worlds" (Rohlf, 2010). Here, the transcendental (a priori) corresponds with the sphere of the mental, and, accordingly, the things-in-themselves and things-to-us belong to two different worlds — the physical (objective) and the mental (subjective). Thereby, transcendentalism approaches the phenomenalism of Berkeley. Even Kant himself indicates the error of a similar interpretation, with which the second edition of his Critique is complimented by the chapter 'The Refutation of Idealism', with the goal of refuting such mentalist (subjectivist) interpretation of his transcendentalism.

The theory of two-aspect interpretation of transcendentalism is more suitable to the spirit of transcendentalism, in which Kant's thing-in-itself and thing-as-it-appears-to-us are not considered two different ontological entities (objects), but as "two sides (aspects)," or a "two-fold point of consideration/two modes of representation (objects of the senses and the understanding; resp. empirical and transcendental perspectives)" of one and the same real-life object [KrV, BXVIII ed.].

In this interpretation the transcendental shift does not displace the intention of the study to the right limit to the analysis of the [empirical] subject, i.e. it does not immerse us in the study of the content of consciousness, but stops at the middle area of the transcendentality, which Kant calls "the mode (or faculty) of cognition". On the epistemic scale it is represented as follows:

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3 Also see Kant’s notes from Prolegomena: «The word ‘transcendental’, which with me means a reference of our cognition, i.e., not to things, but only to the cognitive faculty...».
4 Comp.: “The Critique… teaches that the object should be taken in a twofold meaning, namely as appearance or as thing in itself” [KrV, BXXVII].
The crucial thesis of transcendentalism should be noticed, that our [empirical] knowledge contains some a priori, i.e. any experience comprises both experienced and inexperienced components. Therefore, it should be considered a more subtle distinction between the a priori and the transcendental. In this regard it worth mentioning the change in the definition of TrPh: in the 2nd ed. of Critique not a priori concepts (1st ed.) but our a priori mode of cognition is the object of TrPh. Thus “late” Kant does not equate transcendental to a priori, but understands it as the possibility of a priori [knowledge]. In this regard we should pay attention to Kant’s remark in [KrV, B80–1], which states that “not all a priori knowledge should be [included]” in the area of the transcendental, but only the knowledge of its (1) possibility and (2) use in the experience, i.e. objective significance of a priori. Although Kant understands the possibility of a priori, inter alia, as its epigenesis [KrV, B 91, 118–9, 127–8, 167], the essence of transcendental is associated with (2), i.e. with opportunity to apply a priori in our [empirical] cognition. Therefore, if a priori can be correlated with the non-platonic subjective realm of consciousness, the transcendental (as transcendality) correlates with the area of Erfahrung: this is not Cartesian “innate ideas” but trans-subjective principles which constitute our “mode of cognition”.

Thus Kant’s characteristic of transcendentalism as the research of our “mode of cognition” should be understood not subjective-psychologically, in terms of analysis of our faculties of cognition and/or solution of the problem of (epi)genesis of a priori, but cognitive-semantically as a solution of the problem of objectivity of a priori representations, i.e. the possibility of their use in experience. Kant tells about the semantic orientation of transcendentalism in a letter to M.Herz (21.02.1772), in which he explicates the idea of his Critique as a response to the following ‘semantic’ question for the first time: “What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call ‘representation’ to the object?” Thus the Kant’s position or transcendentalism in the narrow sense is connected with the solution of “the main transcendental question” about the objectivity of a priori representations, which are located in the middle of the epistemic scale, while the metaphysics developed by Kant’s appears as metaphysics of possible experience.

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However, the described first phase of the transcendental shift does not yet characterize the specifics of Kant’s transcendentalism, but sets a range of à la transcendental concepts. This “withdrawal” of subject and object in favor of some primary in respect to the subject and object of the given occurs, for example, in Empiriocriticism, Marxism, Popper’s three-worlds-theory and other non-classical philosophical systems. Thus, Kant stands at the origins of the transcendental paradigm of philosophizing, the transition to which is connected with overcoming both objective (Antiquity) and subjective (Modern Era) points of view and moving the intention of research to the middle between object and subject area which Kant associates with experience/Erfahrung.

It worth noting that the concept of the mature Plato is the first ancestor of this type of philosophizing, where ideas are postulated as a necessary component of cognition without which a person “will have nothing on which his mind can rest; and so he will utterly destroy the power of reasoning” [Parmenides, 135c]. Husserl further develops this intention, as Kant’s transcendental shift can be interpreted as a return to some pre-reflective state of mind in the act of cognition, in which neither the subject nor the object opposing it differ yet, and although the intention of our [intentional according to Husserl] consciousness is directed on an object, but the phenomenal given experience, which is the inception of our knowledge, is the primary given for it5. Accordingly,

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5 Accordingly, the Kantian shift could be called the transcendental-phenomenological, and Kantian Erfahrung can be
subject and object presumed by classical paradigm as primary appear as secondary entities in transcendental paradigm of philosophizing.

If the thing appears to be the main object of the study of the ancient paradigm of philosophy, i.e. the metaphysics of a thing/object is developing (transcendent metaphysics; meta–physics), and the consciousness/cogito appears to be the object of the classical paradigm of Modern Era (respectively, the metaphysics of a ‘subject’ [immanent metaphysics; meta–psychology] is developing), then the middle area of ‘Erfahrung’ is the object of the transcendental type of philosophizing, which appears in the transcendentalism (= transcendental metaphysics) of Kant:

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\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{Thing} & \leftrightarrow & \text{Erfahrung} & \leftrightarrow & \text{Consciousness} \\
\text{metaphysics of a ‘object’} & \leftrightarrow & \text{metaphysics of experience} & \leftrightarrow & \text{metaphysics of a ‘subject’} \\
\text{Ancient paradigm} & \leftrightarrow & \text{Transcendentalism} & \leftrightarrow & \text{Classical paradigm}
\end{array}
\]

(Note on transcendental ontology) A feature of this type of philosophizing puts forth that that which correlates with its ontology (the realm of the transcendental or the realm of experience) is neither subjective nor objective. The metaphor of a telescope conveys the nature of transcendental ontology well. (G.Frege) Suppose that we observe a star with the aid of a telescope; the star itself will have an objective (real) status (which corresponds to the Kantian thing-in-itself). Our existing mental image of it will already be subjective. Let us ask the question: what status will the star have on the lens of the telescope (that can correlate with the Kantian thing-for-us), which is basically as if between the objective (real) star itself and its subjective (mental) image of our consciousness? Our answer will be that this "image (telescope)" will have a specific intermediate ontological status — a transcendental status (compare with Husserl's intentionality reality or Popper's third world).

We now proceed to further analysis of Kant's transcendental shift, to the analysis of his second — metaphysical — phase, with which the specifics of Kant's own transcendentalism should be linked. This specifics are largely predetermined by Kant to build his “experimental” metaphysics (by analogy with the experimental science of Modern Era) “new method of thought” (B XVIII), or transcendental method (Cohen, Natorp).

Like any metaphysical method, the transcendental method is in the universalization of the empirically given by its liberation from particular conditions. Actually beginning from Antiquity (Plato, Aristotle, etc) any field of science (meta–physics) deals with the kind of "overcoming of empirical", but the specific of “scientific” transcendental metaphysics comparing with the previous “school” metaphysics, is largely (though not completely) predetermined by the fact that the object of its generalizations is not a thing or consciousness, but experience. Transcendentalism acts as metaphysics of experience.

However, the determining thing for the 'new method of thought' of the Kantian transcendentalism that distinguishes it from traditional metaphysics is that this is not only the subject which changes, but also the style of philosophizing and foremost, the way of introducing metaphysical abstractions. Traditional metaphysics, being traced back to Aristotle, is a doctrine about essence, which is positioned as something meta-physical, i.e. as fundamentally unobservable underlying-ness in the base (‘sub–stance’) of the sensuously given. For Kantian “experimental” metaphysics the methodological differentiation of ‘real — possible’ is the essential.

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4 “Critique stands in the same relation to the common metaphysics of the schools, as chemistry does to alchemy, or as astronomy to the astrology…” (Kant, Proil).

6 “Critique stands in the same relation to the common metaphysics of the schools, as chemistry does to alchemy, or as astronomy to the astrology…” (Kant, Prol).
The transcendentality, unlike the empirical-actual-ness, acts as possible. Kant, accordingly, is building new metaphysics — the metaphysics of possible experience which acts as the transcendental generalization of empirical experience and in the result of which the structure of "transcendental O — transcendental S", encompassing the empirical relation O — S, is formed:

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\text{transcendental O} \rightarrow \{ \text{empirical O — empirical S} \} \rightarrow \text{transcendental S}
\]

Transcendental-metaphysical, unlike essential-metaphysical, acts as a “horizontal” functional generalization of given empirical pattern. It is based on the transition of the transcendental perspective if an object of empirical perception acts as an appearance (phenomenon) or empirically given in the appearance of the thing, which by the thing of transcendental perspective act as an abstract thing-in-general, which Kant identifies with the transcendental object [KrV, A250].

On this subject Kant writes: “The transcendental use [of a conception]... is this, that it is referred to things in general and to itself [= thing-in-itself], but the empirical use, when merely to phenomena [= empirical things, or things-as-it-appears-to-us]” [KrV, B298]7.

As a result of such transcendental generalization the empirical subject and object are converted to, respectively, the consciousness generally or all the (*?*) transcendental subject (transcendental unity of apperception; TUA) and the (*?*) object-in-general or the transcendental thing/object (TO), the relation between which predefines the possible experience. Or, considering the primacy of experience, the possible experience is conceptualized by Kant as the “interaction” of transcendental object and subject. In this case TUA and TO are introduced by Kant in a correlative manner: «the transcendental unity of apperception that all the manifold, given in intuition is united into a conception of the [transcendental] object» [KrV, B140]7:

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\text{empirical Subject} \rightarrow \text{Experience/Erfahrung} \rightarrow \text{empirical Object}
\]

\[
\text{Transcendental Subject} \leftarrow \text{Emp.Ob} \rightarrow \text{Emp.Sub} \rightarrow \text{Transcendental Object}
\]

(consciousness generally)

(object in general)

\{Note on Kantian distinction ‘transcendent vs. transcendental’\} However, Kant’s “subjective” and “objective” things-in-themselves, which act as kind of left and right limits of the epistemic scale, should be distinguished from transcendental subject and object. The thing-in-itself and noumenal ‘I’ are not transcendental but transcendent. According to Kant, their function is negative and is to specify all the cognitive scale the same way as a numerical scale is given through marks "plus" and "minus" of infinity (+8 and −8), i.e. to mark the limits of our possible cognition. At the same time they are inaccessible for cognition. Transcendental subject (TUA) and object (TO) as the constitutive elements of the possible experience on the scale are between empirical-phenomenal (immanent) and transcendent. Considering this, the Kantian transcendental shift may be represented as follows:

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\text{transcendental object stands as objective function of our representation of the world and lies (together with categories) as a base of the transcendental ontology, the essence of which can be expressed by the thesis: “We know not [physical] objects, but we know phenomena objectively [‘thing-ly’].” (E. Cassirer).}
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Conclusion. A schematically whole shift has two phases: its own displacement and the *transcendental generalization* and may be represented as follows:

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\text{transcendental thing/object} \quad \text{transcendental subject}
\]

\{ ‘thing in general’ [Kv, B298] \} \quad \{ ‘consciousness generally’ [Prol, § 20] \}

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References: