I

Introduction

There has been substantial debate in recent philosophical literature concerning the nature, purpose and effectiveness of transcendental arguments. Much of this literature has taken as its point of departure the writings of Immanuel Kant since, historically, it is Kant who placed transcendental arguments at the centre of his philosophical enterprise. Kant is the paradigmatic exponent of the transcendental argument. In light of this, the aims of this paper can be set out as follows:

1. To establish exactly what Kant took to be a transcendental argument.
2. To critically compare his conception to more recent versions of transcendental arguments.
3. To illustrate, in light of 2, the crucial difference between Kant’s conception of transcendental arguments and the contemporary conception1.

In the course of this essay an interpretation of Kant will undoubtedly emerge. This is unavoidable. Given this, it is possible to discern the following aims:

4. Present and defend an interpretation of Kant’s transcendental arguments.

1 It would be impractical to try to compare Kant’s conception of transcendental arguments to every instance of their implementation in recent philosophical literature. For this reason I will focus on common features of varying instances of transcendental arguments and derive a common form.
5. Relate this interpretation to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and to the relevant secondary literature.

It should be noted that the latter two are implicit rather than explicit aims. They cannot be distinguished from the argument of the essay as a whole and will thus emerge through the following discussion.

II

**Definitions.**

What is a transcendental argument? This is not an easy question to answer. Defining transcendental arguments is a philosophically demanding and difficult task not least due to the many ambiguities in the various prior instances of transcendental arguments and putative definitions. This is nothing new. Such difficulties and ambiguities can be traced to Kant himself. Commentators are divided as to the exact nature of transcendental arguments. Consequently, they are divided as to how they are to be characterised. It is, however, possible to state a provisional characterisation as follows:

in transcendental arguments, a certain phenomenon \( p \) is argued to have certain necessary conditions \( c \), (Mendola, J, ‘Transcendental Arguments’, in, *A Companion to Metaphysics*, ed, J. Kim and E. Sosa, p497.).

On first inspection the above would seem to capture in essence the nature of a transcendental argument. It will, however, be shown to be insubstantial. It is thus imperative to give a fuller exposition at the outset as to the nature and purpose of a transcendental argument. Walsh describes a transcendental argument thus:
a transcendental argument follows a pattern which is straightforwardly deductive. It first lays down that P could not be true unless Q were true. It then goes on to assert the truth of P. Finally it draws the conclusion that Q must be true as well, (Walsh, W.H, *Kant’s Criticisms of Metaphysics*, p101).

To this Walsh adds, ‘There is nothing peculiar in the logic here; interest centres rather on the right to assert the premises and hence on the right to assert the conclusion’, (Walsh, p101). This is instructive. It seems to be the case that a transcendental argument is distinguished, not by its specific logical form, which can be expressed:

1) \( P \rightarrow Q \)
2) P
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3) Q

- (the applicability of this form qualifies transcendental arguments as a species of *modus ponens*) - rather, it is distinguished by the supposed status and use of its major premise.

In the above argument, the second premise (P) asserts something; for example, ‘I have experience’. This proposition is philosophically uninteresting in the sense that it is trivial and would not be doubted by even the most stubborn of sceptics. However, this premise is shown through the course of the argument to require for its truth the truth of a further, more philosophically intriguing, premise. Gardner’s example is, ‘...the principle of causality, is also true’, (Gardner, [1], p188/189). Thus transcendental arguments generate ‘conditional’ conclusions: ‘if ‘I’ am to have experience, then causality must obtain’ (Gardner, [1], p189).
This is all very well. It would be slightly puzzling, however, if it were not for the proviso that transcendental arguments are commonly used in defence against some form of scepticism.

Transcendental arguments are designed to answer scepticism. The second premise makes an assertion (P). It is claimed that such an assertion would be accepted by even the most stubborn of sceptics. The first premise, in relation to this, is designed to show that there is a ‘necessary condition’ (Q) which must obtain in order for the second premise to obtain. Since the sceptic will accept the second premise (P), they are committed to the acceptance of the ‘necessary condition’ (Q) of the second premise. It is, however, this very ‘necessary condition’ that the sceptic typically denies. Thus, a transcendental argument aims to show that the sceptical position is inconsistent as the sceptic denies the necessary condition for what they accept. As a result of this, the conclusion of the argument is held to be impervious to sceptical doubt, for in seeking to doubt it, the sceptic would, logically, be doubting something that they cannot intelligibly doubt; in Gardner’s example, that they have experience.

I will take the conclusion of this examination, i.e. the example of the general form of a transcendental argument reached, to be paradigmatic of a modern conception of the form of a transcendental argument. It will be referred to in what follows as a transcendental argument narrowly conceived.

In regards to this model of a transcendental argument, (and given the fact that it has been left ‘open’ as to the exact nature of the necessary condition), it is possible to discern, as Stern has done, four applications of transcendental argumentation: truth-directed transcendental arguments, belief-directed transcendental arguments, experience-directed transcendental arguments, and
concept-directed transcendental arguments (Stern, p10). It will be seen, by applying the *modus ponens* form to two of Stern’s examples, that they follow the same logical form.

In the case of the *truth-directed* transcendental argument the relevant premises are as follows:

‘For experience to be possible, there must be physical objects’.
That is, 1) $P \rightarrow Q$

‘I have experience’.
That is, 2) $P$

Therefore, ‘there are physical objects’.
That is, therefore, 3) $Q$

Thus, a *truth-directed* transcendental argument is of the form:

$$1) P \rightarrow Q$$

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2 *(1) A is a *truth-directed* transcendental argument, where $X$ is specified as some non-psychological fact or state of affairs which is claimed to be a necessary condition for experience, language, etc.
* e.g. For experience to be possible, there must be physical objects.
(2) A is a *belief-directed* transcendental argument, where $X$ is specified as some belief which is claimed to be a necessary condition for experience, language, or some other belief(s), etc.
* e.g. For individuals to have beliefs about their own mental state, they must believe that there is an external world.
(3) A is an *experience-directed* transcendental argument, where $X$ is specified as a way in which things must be experienced as being or appear to be, as a necessary condition for having experience of another kind, or language, beliefs, etc.
* e.g. For individuals to have subjective sensations or feelings, they must have experience as of an external world.
(4) A is a *concept-directed* transcendental argument, where $X$ is specified as a context in which a concept-user must have acquired the capacity to employ the concept $C$, as a necessary condition for acquiring the capacity to apply the concept $C$ at all.
* e.g. For individuals to have learnt how to apply the concept ‘pain’, they must have acquired the capacity to apply that concept to others as well as themselves*, (Stern, p10/11).
In the case of a *experience-directed* transcendental argument:

‘For individuals to have subjective sensations or feelings, they must have experience as of an external world’.
That is, 1) P→Q
‘I have subjective sensations or feelings’.
That is, 2) P
Therefore, ‘I have experience as of an external world’
That is, therefore, 3) Q

Thus, an *experience-directed* transcendental argument is of the form:

1) P→Q
2) P
—
3) Q

Given the applicability of this form to Stern’s examples it can be said that they seek to establish conclusions which are, to paraphrase Gardner, ‘immune to scepticism’.

The question now arises: is it appropriate to attribute this general model of a transcendental argument to Kant? In what follows I aim to show that such an attribution is complicated and perhaps controversial. Such an attribution is an imposition onto Kant’s text
of a strategy that is in fact more complicated in his text than at first appears. In order to show this successfully it is necessary to engage in a brief though comprehensive exposition of Kant’s main argument in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Only through this will a true picture of Kant’s transcendental arguments emerge.

III

**Exposition.**

The first task of philosophy is to set its own limits, (Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, p17).

Kant was worried about the contradictory state of metaphysics\(^3\). He describes metaphysics as having been ‘up to now’ a, ‘...mere groping, and what is the worst, a groping among mere concepts’, (Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, BXV/BXVI, p110). A rejection of metaphysics was, however, out of the question for Kant. Instead, he attempted to determine whether or not a discipline called ‘metaphysics’ was possible at all. Kant calls on *reason* to subject itself to a ‘critique’ in order to determine the answer to this question – that is, the question of the problem of metaphysics.

Indeed Kant, when referring to his set task, gives us insight to what will be the solution to this problem; he says, ‘...my critical project, which concerns solely the sources of synthetic *a priori* cognition...’,(Kant, A204/B250, p313). It can therefore be said that for Kant, this entire question could be summarised thus: how are synthetic *a priori* judgements possible? His doctrine of transcendental idealism supplies his answer to this question. Two of the fundamental components of this doctrine can be shown thus:

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\(^3\) The ‘state’ of metaphysics here equates to the continuous oscillation between Leibnizian ‘dogmatism’ and Humean ‘scepticism’.
1) ‘Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them a priori through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an a priori cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us’, (Kant, BXVI, p110).

2) ‘…that the object should be taken in a twofold meaning, namely as appearance or as thing in itself;…’, (Kant, BXXVII/BXXVIII, p116).

In regards to 2), it should be added that objects are known, to human subjects, only as appearance. Indeed, appearance for Kant signals an object that is ‘constituted’ by the subject. He juxtaposes such appearances with what he calls ‘things in themselves’; these are to be taken as objects, or ‘things’, which are not constituted by the subject and are therefore not the subjects of human knowledge. Drawing together the above quotations taken from the Critique of Pure Reason it is possible to give a characterisation as to what Kant meant by transcendental idealism. An object, when considered as appearance, conforms necessarily to ‘our’ (that is, human) conditioned mode of knowledge. By contrast that same object, when considered as falling into the category of ‘things in themselves’, would not conform to of our ‘mode of knowledge’. For Kant, sensory experience is a necessary means by which human subjects gain knowledge – it is a necessary part of our ‘mode of knowledge’. It follows that appearances are objects that are ‘given’ in sense-experience. Following Gardner, it can be said that Kant, by his doctrine of transcendental idealism, holds that empirical objects (appearances) are the only possible ‘objects of knowledge’ for

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4 ‘An appearance (Erscheinung), for Kant, is an object constituted…..by the subject; a thing in itself (Ding an sich) is an object constituted independently of the subject’, (Gardner [2], ‘Kant’, in, Philosophy 2 further through the subject, ed. A.C. Grayling, p578).
‘subjects’ such as human beings and that the limits of such knowledge matches up with the limits of possible experience.

On a further explanatory note it can be added that, since Kant’s philosophy restricts the knowledge of beings like humans\(^5\) (beings with space and time as the forms of their intuitions) to appearances it is to be regarded as a form of idealism. The ‘Critical’ dimension stems from the fact that Kant’s project is premised upon a, as Gardner characterises it, ‘prior reflexive examination of our cognitive powers’. Hence the aforementioned division of appearances and ‘things in themselves’—human beings only being capable of knowledge of the former. The Transcendental component has as its base the ‘Copernican’ proviso that ‘objects conform to knowledge’; that is, they (objects) stand in a relation of conformity with the cognitive powers or constitution of the subject.

Kant’s distinction of ‘appearance and thing in itself’ is of crucial importance. As noted above, human subjects do not experience ‘things in themselves’ but only the mere representations they occasion in our faculty of sensibility. It should also be noted that as a corollary of this, space and time are not properties of ‘things in themselves’, but only of our ‘mode of knowledge’. As noted by Forster, this step in Kant’s argument is of crucial importance for, if the objects of our knowledge were not appearances and thus ‘things in themselves’, it would follow that all our knowledge would be \textit{a posteriori}. The element of mediation that is entailed in Kant’s proviso that the form of our intuitions of space and time would be redundant for they belong to a specific ‘mode of knowledge’ that, in its truth, entails the possibility of synthetic \textit{a priori} judgements. For Kant, such a conclusion would be unacceptable (that beings such as

\(^5\) It should be noted that the above analysis holds for beings with space and time as the forms of their intuitions. For Kant, human beings fall into this category. In the \textit{Critique} Kant also refers to beings who have ‘intellectual intuitions’. Such beings would not have space and time as the forms of their intuitions and would therefore not be human.
us have knowledge of ‘things in themselves’) for it would preclude the very thing he wishes to establish; that is, synthetic a priority⁶.

It can already be seen from what has been said that the word ‘transcendental’ has a very precise meaning for Kant. It does not signify something that passes beyond all experience, that is, transcendent, rather it signifies something that precedes experience a priori and enables the cognition of experience.

A transcendental inquiry in philosophy, such as Kant’s, signals a specific method. Such a method consists in the identification of the ‘necessary conditions of possible experience’ of objects. For Kant, such conditions are necessary if any experience of objects is going to take place at all.

Tightly packed as this brief exposition of Kant’s transcendental idealism has been a few further remarks should make it – and Kant’s motivation – transparent.

For Kant the subject of experience, although not causing their experience, nevertheless contributes significantly to it⁷. For Kant the mind is ‘active’ and ‘experience is ‘constituted’. It is in connection to this that synthetic a priori is entailed for, if the individual subject of experience, although not the sole cause of their experience, nevertheless makes a significant contribution, without which no experience were possible, then some synthetic a priori judgements would be ‘possible’ in philosophy as a whole. If

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⁶ See Forster, p5.

⁷ I will not, here, give an exposition of Kant’s faculty theory of mind, or, to intuitions and concepts, sensibility and understanding. Although no exposition of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason would be complete without a discussion of these issues it should be noted that, although comprehensiveness is a virtue, a comprehensive exposition of the Critique of Pure Reason is not my primary aim here. Rather, I am concerned specifically with transcendental arguments. With this in mind, it should be clear that such an exposition would, in fact, be surplus to requirements.
this were the case then we could pre-judge the ‘form’, but not the matter (content), of possible experience. Following this, it would be possible to make valid a priori judgements about experience. On Forster’s reading of Kant, the *Critique of Pure Reason* attempts to prove that this contention is correct (see Forster, p5).

Indeed for Kant, sensory impressions received by our senses are not sufficient for knowledge. This is due to the fact that the faculty of sensibility, whereby we receive such impressions, is a passive faculty. The faculty of sensibility does not connect or relate the manifold it receives in any way. No knowledge can arise from this faculty. In order for knowledge of objects to obtain, the manifold that is received through sensibility has to be taken up, ordered and related. As Kant says, ‘...the spontaneity of our thought requires that this manifold first be gone through, taken up, and combined in a certain way in order for a cognition to be made out of it’, (Kant, A77, p210).

We must now consider the transcendental deduction. According to Forster, it is here that the ‘second and decisive step’ of Kant’s argument happens. Kant argues that self-consciousness is itself possible only if there is experience of an ‘objective order’ that is distinguishable from the order of representations which are occasioned in the ‘mind’; such an order is merely ‘subjective’. Since it is certain that I am self-conscious, but am only given an unconnected manifold through my sensibility, it follows that the individual subject must, by necessity, take up this manifold, connect it and so on, in a definite manner. Only by so doing will the subject

8 It is necessary here to distinguish between the ‘metaphysical deduction’ and the ‘transcendental deduction’. The ‘metaphysical deduction’ seeks to establish the ‘number and character’ of the categories of the understanding from the principles of general logic. The ‘transcendental deduction’ seeks to establish the ‘legitimacy’ of such categories. I will not be concerned, specifically, with the ‘metaphysical deduction’ in this essay. The nature and purpose of the ‘transcendental deduction’ will however be pivotal in the discussion. The characterisation of both the deductions here draws on the entry ‘deduction’ in, *A Kant Dictionary*, by H. Caygill.
be able to impose upon this manifold the ‘objective order’ necessary for the existence of the objects of experience to be possible. For Kant, these objects of experience are constitutive of nature. It follows that this process is necessary for the very existence of the natural world. Any experience in an individual human subject is, by necessity, subject to rules or laws of the understanding that occasion the experience as ‘mine’ (see Forster, p5).

For Kant, the faculty of the understanding, where such operations take place is characterised as the, ‘...faculty of rules.....[and].....Rules, so far as they are objective.....are called laws’, (Kant, A126/A127, p242).

From this discussion, it is possible to draw a broad conclusion, and thus illustrate Kant’s solution to the question of the problem of metaphysics. Following Forster, we can say that the conditions of possible experience admit of objective validity in synthetic a priori judgements, since they are also the condition of the possible objects of experience. As Kant says, ‘The conditions of the possibility of experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience, and on this account have objective validity in a synthetic judgment a priori’, (Kant, A158/B198, p283). It is evident from this that the conclusions Kant sought were idealistic. The proviso that, ‘the conditions of the possibility of experience’ are also ‘the conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience’ makes sense only on this reading.

Through this brief exposition and interpretation of Kant’s main line of argument a picture has emerged, not only of his transcendental idealism, but also of his transcendental method and general argumentative strategy. We are now ready to turn to the specific
question concerning transcendental arguments. From what has been said, considerable light will have already been shed on this problem. For, as was remarked at the beginning, many philosophers (mainly of the analytic persuasion) take Kant to be doing something quite specific, that is, applying transcendental arguments narrowly conceived. I hope to be able to show that this reading is complicated.

IV

The question of ascription.

As Stern has shown in his book Transcendental Arguments and Scepticism, the result of Strawson’s work on Kant, specifically on Kant’s Refutation of Idealism, has led commentators to interpret the Refutation (Stern, p142) as a ‘truth-directed’ transcendental argument (see Stern, p142). Kant’s transcendental deduction has also been interpreted as a transcendental argument. Mendola sights the Transcendental Deduction as one of the paradigm examples of a transcendental argument (see Mendola, p497).

Stern, however, is not happy about the result of Strawson’s interpretation. His contention is that Kant does not offer a ‘truth-directed’ transcendental argument, specifically, in the Refutation. Rather, Stern contends, ‘...that Kant uses an experience-directed transcendental argument...’, (Stern, p144). On his reading, then,

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9 I reproduce Stern’s definition here for easy reference, ‘(1) A is a truth-directed transcendental argument, where X is specified as some non-psychological fact or state of affairs which is claimed to be a necessary condition for experience, language, etc. e.g. For experience to be possible, there must be physical objects.’

10 Again I reproduce the above quotation from Stern for easy reference. ‘ (3) A is an experience-directed transcendental argument, where X is specified as a way in which things must be experienced as being or appear to be, as a necessary condition for having experience of another kind, or language, beliefs, etc. e.g. For individuals to have subjective sensations or feelings, they must have experience as of an external world.’

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Kant would be, ‘...using a phenomenological transcendental argument strategy against Hume’s normativist scepticism regarding our belief in the external world’, (Stern, p144).

In regards to the argument we are constructing here, it is not of particular importance whether Strawson’s reading or Stern’s reading of Kant is the ‘correct’ one. This is so because, regardless of which reading we accept, in accepting either we would be attributing a particular argumentative strategy to Kant. We would also be interpreting Kant in this way if we were to accept the reading of the Transcendental Deduction advocated by Mendola. On these three readings, Kant would indeed be a (perhaps ‘the’) prime example of a philosopher who used transcendental arguments, narrowly conceived¹¹. Our problem here is to show that such an attribution is not straight-forward and may result in a misunderstanding of his project if not carefully augmented in terms that we will outline.

If we, for the sake of argument, take Strawson to be correct in his interpretation – that is, that Kant offers us a ‘truth-directed’ transcendental argument – then the following would apply. Kant would be using a valid deductive argument contra the epistemic sceptic to the effect that what the sceptic claims is, generously, doubtful. This argument follows precisely the lines we followed in our characterisation of a transcendental argument narrowly conceived. If the Refutation of Idealism is taken in this way then it seems that Kant would, non-controversially, be employing such a strategy.

¹¹ Thus, the following form of transcendental argument (as discussed above):

1) P → Q
2) P
3) Q

can be attributed to him in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. 
As Stern points out, on such a reading, Kant would be liable to the following charge: that, for example, physical things have to be assumed by minds as existing independently of them, but the issue of their actual existence (independently of minds) remains unaccounted for.

For Kant, such an objection would portray a misunderstanding of his project. This issue will be dealt with explicitly in the section ‘Further considerations’ below. Before this, however, we will turn to the specific question of transcendental arguments. Only by so doing can we proceed.

V

The argument.
The first point that should be noted is that although Kant himself does use the term transcendental argument, he uses it to refer to an argument that transcends the legitimate deployment of the faculty of the understanding (see Stern, p7n). This is crucial. As Stern notes, this employment of the term ‘transcendental argument’ is not what would now be characterised as a transcendental argument. Is this merely a historical curiosity, a terminological discrepancy that makes no difference to the aims and purpose of Kant’s work? After all, can there be any conclusions of substance drawn from such ‘semantic quibbling’?

As has already been noted, the ascription of transcendental arguments, narrowly conceived, to Kant would imply that he was doing something very specific in the Critique. Kant, however, does not seem to have conceived his task in this way. Rather than talk of ‘transcendental arguments’ Kant tended to use the technical notion of ‘transcendental deduction’, ‘transcendental exposition’ and
'transcendental proof'. For example, in arguing against 'metaphysical presuppositions', Kant opposes ‘...a transcendental proof...’, (Kant, A174, p294) and not a transcendental argument. Given this, are we entitled to gloss over this point and nevertheless ascribe the transcendental argumentative strategy without any further remark? I believe not.

It is of paramount significance that Kant spoke, not of transcendental arguments, but of ‘transcendental deduction’, ‘proof’ and ‘exposition’ in regards to his method. As is pointed out by Forster and Caygill, Kant’s preferred model of deduction in these matters is a legal deduction and not the strict logical ‘proof-procedure’ used in logic. As Forster notes, the jurists that Kant took as his example distinguished between the establishment of facts, the quaestio facti, and the quaestio juris, the investigation into whether or not said facts ‘exist rightfully’. The procedure, the outcome of which, decides the quaestio juris required the demonstration that an individual ‘claim’ or ‘possession’ was obtained ‘lawfully’. As Forster reminds us, in Kant’s time this procedure was referred to as a deduction.

Forster, in our view, rightfully claims that the similarity between this method of deduction and the method employed by Kant in the Critique are evidently similar. Like the quaestio juris, the transcendental method is concerned with the ‘origin’ of the possession of metaphysical knowledge, i.e. ‘the subjective conditions of its possibility’. As Forster shows, there is a strict analogy between a legal claim and a metaphysical knowledge claim, for the latter is justified by the ‘discernment of its origin’. As Forster puts it: ‘...such a claim is justified precisely if one is entitled to assert the possession of that knowledge’, (Forster, p6/7).

in his choice of language Kant makes this influence conspicuous, for, as has already been noted, he characterises the faculty of ‘understanding’ as ‘the faculty of rules’ and rules that are objective (pertaining to the cognition of objects) are designated ‘laws’ (Kant, A126/A127, p242).

Kant remains true to this influence when discussing the claims of unchecked pure reason.

For there are so many unfounded presumptions of the amplification of our cognition through pure reason that it must be adopted as a general principle to be distrustful of them all and not to believe and accept even the clearest dogmatic proof of this sort of proposition without documents that could provide a well-grounded deduction, (Kant, B255/A210, p315, [bold: my emphasis]).

It is clear from this that Kant regarded his project as proceeding on legalistic lines. In the above quote from the Critique, Kant is doing exactly what Forster contends; he is questioning the ‘origin’ of a ‘possession’ of metaphysical knowledge.

Given this, the ascription of ‘transcendental arguments’ in the narrow sense, to Kant, is complicated. Kant did not see himself as straightforwardly applying transcendental arguments in the narrow sense. Rather, he saw himself as providing a ‘deduction’ that would satisfy the philosopher in the manner that a legal deduction would a lawyer.

In the above proposition, therefore, the beginning of a deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding has been made... (Kant, B144/B145, p253)\(^{13}\),

We can then say that those who wish to ascribe such narrowly conceived transcendental arguments to Kant are overlooking these considerations. For, as Forster notes, ‘...

\(^{13}\) Deduction: bold in the original.
transcendental arguments are *not* transcendental deductions’, (Forster, p10). There are further reasons for making this claim. We shall now consider these.

VI

**Further considerations.**

We have already mentioned that the answer to the problem of metaphysics that Kant sought was the answer to the question ‘how are synthetic *a priori* judgements possible?’ The notion of a synthetic *a priori* judgment is central to Kant’s overall thesis. What would happen if we ignored this condition? Would it not be the case that we had simply misinterpreted Kant’s work?

We have given a characterisation of a transcendental argument above, but we have not analysed in any detail the specific nature and status of its conclusion. Clearly such an argument, if it were to be acceptable to Kant, would have to establish a synthetic *a priori* conclusion. This is not the case, since, as characterised above and on Gardner’s reading, transcendental arguments rely on conceptual connections (see Gardner, [1], p189). Given this, the conclusions of such transcendental arguments are analytic and not synthetic *a priori*. Thus, for Kant such arguments could only ever establish ‘subjective conditions of thought’ and could never establish ‘objective validity’. It seems clear that such arguments should not be attributed to Kant without due cause, as to do so would weaken his position.

There is a further reason to problematise such ascriptions. Kant was well aware of the fact that mere conceptual connections would not satisfy his requirements and he makes it clear that his
arguments should be construed idealistically, for only then do they have sufficient clout.

The proof does not show, that is, that the given concept (e.g., of that which happens) leads directly to another concept (that of a cause), for such a transition would be a leap for which nothing could be held responsible; rather it shows that **experience itself, hence the object of experience, would be impossible** without such a connection. The proof, therefore, had to indicate at the same time the possibility of achieving synthetically and a priori a certain cognition of things which is not contained in the concept of them (Kant, A783/B811, p665, [bold: my emphasis]).

We see again in Kant’s words the explicit connection between ‘the conditions of experience’ and ‘the conditions of the objects of experience’, and given this, it is possible to make the following assertion, following Gardner’s reading: that only to an idealist, or from an idealistic point of view, would the notion of a **condition of cognition** also being a **condition of an object** make sense (see Gardner [1], p190). Kant does not conceive of transcendental arguments, or the transcendental move generally, in a narrow sense and he does not think of transcendental arguments as distinct from his transcendental method, together with its ‘Copernican’ dimension and strategy of ‘applying transcendental idealism to metaphysical problems’. As Forster rightly notes, Kant’s ‘transcendental proofs’, proofs which herald a synthetic a priori conclusion, require the truth of transcendental idealism.

It is possible to draw together all that has been discussed by turning to Kant’s words in the *Critique*. He says:

Pure concepts of the understanding are therefore possible, indeed necessary a priori in relation to experience, only because our cognition has to do with nothing but appearances, whose possibility lies in ourselves, whose connection and unity (in the representation of an object) is encountered merely in us, and thus must precede all
experience and first make it possible as far as its form is concerned. And from this ground, the only possible one among all, our deduction of the categories has been conducted, (Kant, A130, p244).

As such, it is possible to state that, since on the contemporary construal of transcendental arguments, although they propose the establishment of non-analytical and non-empirical conclusion and are therefore rightly called ‘transcendental’ they have dropped the requirement that they (transcendental arguments) require the truth of transcendental idealism. This was evident in our discussion at the end of section IV, ‘The question of ascription’, of the argument levied against Kant by those who read him as deploying transcendental arguments, narrowly conceived, against the sceptic. Thus, it is clear that transcendental arguments, on this construal, are not to be attributed to Kant in the Critique of Pure Reason, for they establish merely epistemological (conceptual) connections and not idealist conclusions. Thus to impose such an argument onto Kant would serve only to disconnect his epistemology from his metaphysics.

Such a reading of Kant is only possible when the transcendental deduction or, as the case may be, the Refutation of Idealism, is isolated from the argument of the Critique as a whole. Such an interpretative strategy results in confusion. An interpretation of the Critique must therefore be holistic. No one part can be separated, each plays a necessary role in relation to each other part of the architectonic.

VII

Conclusion
It should now be clear that Kant’s conception of a transcendental argument was not actually that of a narrowly conceived and isolatable argument. Rather, it was of a deduction (or exposition or proof variously). For this reason, his method is more akin to the notion of *quaestio juris* than it is to the contemporary notion of a transcendental argument. This - together with the requirement that Kant’s transcendental proofs required the truth of transcendental idealism - make conspicuous the difference between Kant’s conception of a ‘transcendental argument’ and the contemporary conception. The ascription of the transcendental argument narrowly conceived to Kant’s text, is, from an interpretive point of view, inappropriate.

**Bibliography.**


