

Westphal, Kenneth, *Kant's Critical Epistemology: Why Epistemology Must Consider Judgment First*.  
Abingdon: Routledge, 2020, pp. xxv + 369.

Westphal's project seeks to read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* against the transcendental idealist grain whilst highlighting resources and insights from Kant's commonsense perceptual realism. The book is divided into three parts: I) Epistemological Context, II) Kant's Critical Epistemology, and III) Further Ramifications. While Westphal commits to an impressive and sundry review of Kant's First Critique, balanced with Neo-Kantian bricolage, the central theses that he offers draw from Kant's three Analogies of Experience and the four Paralogisms of Rational Psychology, with interest in the relationship between Kant's theory of perceptual judgment and account of empirical knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Westphal makes the case that Kant's first Critique correctly defends a robust fallibilist account of empirical justification, an insight that has eclipsed most, if not all, previous Kantian interlocutors. Despite Westphal's book is brimming with analyses and critiques of philosophers inspired by and reacting to Kant, historical and contemporary, the true merits of Westphal's project are in his erudite parsing of the first Critique with cognitive semantics in mind.

The first three chapters, which comprise the first section, find Westphal situating Kant within the history of analytic epistemology. In developing this section, Westphal enumerates the state of epistemology prior to Kant—guided by the Cartesian assumption and epitomized by Hume, epistemology was anchored to evidential data, with states of sensory-consciousness undifferentiated from states of self-consciousness awareness. This presumption, when conjoined with infallibilist assumptions about cognitive justification—the infallibilist doctrine being that nothing short of provability suffices for justification—inevitably leads to the egocentric predicament of Cartesian skepticism and internalist infallibilism. Westphal's project stakes to evince that Kant is the first great non-Cartesian epistemologist, developing forms of externalism not only about mental content and causal judgment, but also about cognitive justification (49).

By the end of the first chapter, we see Westphal's thesis begin to take shape: that, although necessary, sensory stimulation is insufficient for cognitive warrant. Sense-data is such that we can process it by bringing it under concepts in judgments whereby we classify and identify the various particulars (objects, events, structures, processes or persons) surrounding us. Throughout Westphal's project, this will reappear in different applicatory scenarios, ranging from semantics to perceptual psychology to metaethics. Westphal's ultimate Critical endeavor is to poise Kant via scientific realism's mold, making the case that Kant's anti-skeptical transcendental proof(s) demonstrates that any human being who is apperceptive—insofar as they are aware of some appearances appearing to occur before, during, or after others—"must actually perceive at least some particulars in her or his surroundings, in order to identify even a presumptive, approximate temporal sequence amongst appearances" (219). Situating Kantian epistemology historically throughout these first three chapters, Westphal cites a number of contemporary epistemological puzzles, such as Gettier-type problems regarding justified true belief and the examples

<sup>1</sup> Kant, I. 1998, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, §A190, 192–3/B235, 237–38, 275.

therewith, which centrally involve what are termed “externalist” factors bearing upon the justificatory status of Someone’s beliefs—factors such that Someone cannot become aware of truth-laden belief(s) by simple reflection. Following Descartes’ cogito argument, stilted on the putative self-transparency of beliefs qua ideas—and those Cartesian epistemologists prioritizing access-internalist infallibilism regarding inner experience—“internalism” was launched in the service of what Westphal terms “global perceptual skepticism”.<sup>2</sup> Kant’s fallibilism, and his transcendental proof that we can only be self-conscious of our existence as determined in time via apperception if we have *some* perceptual experience and knowledge of spatio-temporal causally active substances in our surroundings, counters the skeptical generalization from *occasional* perceptual error to the possibility of universal perceptual error (or, *mutatis mutandis*, insufficient cognitive justification):

[...] any world in which we are altogether perceptually deluded is a world in which no human being can be apperceptive [...]. Global perceptual sceptics simply assume that we can be self-conscious without being conscious of anything outside our minds. Kant’s transcendental proof of realism shows just how portentous is this assumption (227-28).

Furthermore, Kant’s three principles of causal judgment, as detailed in the three Analogies of Experience anchor Westphal’s description of our cognitive capacity for identifying enduring events:

1. Substance persists through changes of state.
2. Changes of state in any one substance are regular or law governed.
3. Causal relations between substances are causal interactions (147).

Kant’s three Analogies are universally quantified and these principles *guide* causal judgment. Moving from phenomenal causality to cognitive semantics, having now broadly outlined his project’s ambitions, Westphal’s second section, “Kant’s Critical Epistemology”, is comprised of six chapters (viz., chapters 4-9). Notably, it is in the fourth chapter, “Constructing Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason”, where Westphal begins to formalize Kant’s semantics of singular, specifically cognitive, reference, prodding philosophy of language, epistemology, and Kant scholarship into truly novel and exciting territory. Westphal first makes the general case that to understand empirical knowledge we must distinguish between predication as a grammatical form of sentences, statements or (candidate) judgments, and predication as a (proto-)cognitive act of ascribing some characteristic(s) or feature(s) to some localized particular(s). By way of Kant, Westphal argues that term “particulars” ought to be construed broadly so as to include any kind of particular we may localize within space and time. Kant sought to expound upon a general phenomenon rather than individual facts, thus systematizing how natural regularities can be and are localized. Westphal argues that Kant’s semantics of singular reference achieves verification empiricism *without* invoking empiricism. Contra verificationist theories of meaning—which only require logically consistent propositions—and whether stated in terms of concepts, propositions, or judgments, Kant’s justification of realism involves explicating classificatory content

<sup>2</sup> Descartes, R. 1985. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 Vols., J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, A. Kenny (eds. & trs.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

descriptions *vis-à-vis* further requirements involved in *actually* classifying or identifying any extant instance so-described, doing so accurately, warrantedly/justifiably and, thus, cognizantly.

By the sixth chapter, Westphal has successfully bridged Kant's objective significance and justifiable cognitive judgment with the refutation of global perceptual skepticism. Thus follows one of Westphal's most interesting developments: drawing from the Transcendental Deduction's description of synthesis in apprehension, where perception must fully accord with the category of quantity, Kant's Thesis of Singular Cognitive Reference "concerns the cognitive, and hence also the epistemological significance of identifying by locating those individuals to which we ascribe any features, by which alone we can know them and can claim to have knowledge of them" (117). Constructing Kant's Semantics of Singular Cognitive Reference, Westphal espouses Gareth Evans' notion of predication as ascription, which requires conjointly specifying a relevant spatio-temporal region and manifest characteristics of any particular that we self-consciously experience or identify (§55).<sup>3</sup> These conjoint specifications allow for the ascription of manifest characteristics that are mutually independent cognitive achievements, integrating sensation/sense-data and conception/understanding through co-operation and integration. Westphal eventually develops a Critical method wherein:

Sensibility is required (though not sufficient) for sensing the various manifest characteristics of the sensed particular, and directing us to its location; Understanding is required (though not sufficient) for explicitly identifying its region and its manifest characteristics, thus enabling us to be apperceptively aware of this particular (262).

Westphal argues that Kant's Thesis of Singular Cognitive Reference services epistemology by substantiating that knowledge, justified belief, or experience of or about particulars require satisfying further conditions than those of conceptual content ("intension") or linguistic meaning alone. No matter how specified or detailed a description/intension may be, it cannot, by itself, determine whether it is referentially empty, determinate, or ambiguous because it describes *what* there is: either zero, one, or several individuals. However, to *know* any spatio-temporal particular requires correctly ascribing *characteristics* to it and localizing it in space and time. Via ostensive designation, we ascribe predicates used in our judgments to some putatively known particular, differentiating and characterizing it. The ascription of characteristics is required for singular, specifically *cognitive*, reference to a spatio-temporal particular, providing the necessary requirement for the truth-evaluability of our claims.

Between Chapters 6-9, Westphal aims to further enrich Kant's cognitive semantics qua particulars in order to provide a legitimate stand-alone epistemological doctrine. It follows that, insofar as epistemological "success term(s)" are considered, logical consistency requires that Someone *uses* that predicative proposition ascriptively to describe characteristics or features to some localized particulars. Kant's transcendental sense of "real possibility" denies that descriptions alone suffice for knowledge—no description suffices to specify and therefore determine whether there is any particular in some specific context by way of sentential meaning, as reference to some extant perceptual particular is required. Westphal pellucidly

<sup>3</sup> Evans, G. 1975, "Identity and Predication", *Journal of Philosophy*, 72, 13, 343-63.

writes that “only when the performer known as Prince ordered and purchased a flamboyantly purple guitar did the concept ‘purple guitar’ come to have ‘real possibility’ in Kant’s full, referable-in-practice, empirical sense of this designation” (246). This undermines Russellian-cum-Quinean confidence in mere intension (predicates as classifications, explicated as mere descriptive phrases) and regimenting indexicals. Kant’s demonstrative (“deictic”) reference is required to obtain even *candidate* cognitive claims. Speaking does not suffice to speak *about* any individual thing, person, event, structure. Merely speaking or thinking intelligibly/understandably requires avoiding self-contradiction, whereas cognition or any claim to knowledge requires localizing the putatively known individual(s) within space and time, together with some approximately correct attribution of characteristics to it or them. Only in referential contexts can we advance from uttering sentences to making any epistemically warranted cognitive statement or claim (§89).

More broadly, Westphal’s point is that empirical knowledge and semantic meaning involve more than simply supplying values for logical variables, as such stipulations, by design, abstract from descriptive identification and intelligibility while presuming purported reference. Reading Kant’s reference-in-practice *vis-à-vis* Tetens’ *realisieren*, Westphal articulates a key “deictic point” central to the conditions that must be satisfied so as to be able to make any sufficiently accurate attribution to even *claim* that something is such-and-so:

S/he must localize that (or those) particulars to which (or to whom) S/he purports to ascribe any feature(s), so as (putatively) to know (cognize) it or them. Cognition is not secured by fortunate guesses in the form of mere descriptions which happen to have (had) some instance somewhere or other within nature or history. Cognition requires identifying by locating relevant particulars so as to be able to know them, or even to mistake them! (118)

Truth pertaining to knowledge, and therefore to epistemology, requires demonstrative reference to relative particulars. Only under these conditions can there be candidate objects of knowledge. Westphal’s project recalls Carnap’s “descriptive semantics”—the pragmatic use of propositions when making cognitive judgments in suitable perceptual or experimental contexts about localized individuals/particulars.<sup>4</sup> As demonstrated by Kant’s Analogies, the causal principles regulating our causal judgments do so by guiding our identifying efficient causes of observed spatio-temporal events. Making such discriminatory, perceptual-causal judgments to identify particulars within our surroundings requires anticipation and modal imagination to consider relevant causally possible alternatives to the apparently perceived causal scenario. Westphal here argues that Kant’s conception of “imagination” is not simply imaging/picture-thinking, but empirically informed counterfactual reasoning about causal possibilities.

The constitutive point in Kant’s three Analogies involves our typically reliable capacities to distinguish and discriminate various kinds of causal sequences and processes amongst the perceptible, causally structured, and interacting particulars that surround us (§§48-49).<sup>5</sup> These particulars regulate our causal judgments. Were we unable to make any such causal discrimination(s) and identification(s) accurately and justifiedly, we would altogether lack apperception of our

<sup>4</sup> Carnap, R. 1956, *Meaning and Necessity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>5</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Pure Reason*, §A84-130/B116-69.

own existence as determined in time. Westphal's cognitive-semantic point here has far-reaching relevance for philosophy of language and epistemology, as well as for the history and philosophy of science, theory of action, and philosophy of mind. As will become the nexus for the third section of Westphal's book, which concerns scientific realism, Kant's cognitive semantics is embedded in and strongly supports Newton's causal realism regarding gravitational force—Westphal makes the case that Newton's methodological Rule 4 of (experimental) philosophy requires any competing scientific hypothesis to have not merely empirical evidence in its favor but also sufficient evidence with sufficient precision to either make an accepted scientific theory or law more exact or to restrict it and demonstrate exceptions to the rule (§§66–67). It is here that Westphal's reading of Kant, rigorous and unique when applied to semantics and epistemology, feels somewhat wanting—while the reader will feel assured that Kant's context-bound externalist epistemology warrants cognitive application within the non-formal domain of empirical knowledge, the diachronic development of physics and other such natural sciences are necessarily tethered to the uptake of particulars (i.e., replicated experiments and tests). Indeed, the Sellarsian apothegm rings true that there are as many scientific images of man as there are sciences which have something to say about man, where each science deploys distinct instruments and methods. It would thus be fruitful if Westphal, particularly given his Hegelian expertise, further explored the always-developing and self-correcting descriptive and explanatory resources of the scientific image and how it shapes rational judgments, which cannot be exhausted by the causal locutions of justificatory judgment, while at once pointing towards a radically non-normative picture of ourselves. Westphal briefly touches on this important consideration but his elaboration of Kant's work on transeunt causal action via rule-governed succession of states does not contend with the irresolvable frame-bound discrepancies between various scientific theories (quantum mechanics vs. Newtonians classical mechanics) or quantum measurement (viz. perceptual observation overdetermines superposition).

Despite this very minor limitation, Westphal's engagement with Kant *vis-à-vis* the history of philosophy is extremely fertile. The second section's latter chapters find Westphal reviewing Kant's inventory of cognitive capacities, describing Kant's insights into rational judgment as articulating "sensationism" about sensations, the view that sensations typically are components of acts of awareness of particulars. Situating Kant as steeped in the Humean predicament of psychological epistemology, Westphal illuminates Kant's account of consciousness by parsing an issue pertinent to contemporary representationalist accounts of perception—that if a sensory idea is caused by an object, then that idea also represents some feature of that object. In the philosophy of perception and neurophysiology, this issue transpires in the "binding problem(s)"—a problem concerning cognitive psychology that deals with explaining what unites any group of sensations into what might be a unified, fluid percept of any one object (§22). This problem arises synchronically within any moment of perception of an object and arises diachronically as a problem of integrating successive percepts of the same object: one set of issues is sensory, concerning the generation of sensory appearances to each of us; the second set is intellectual, concerning how we recognize the various parcels of sensory information we receive through sensory experience to be information about a spatio-temporally consistent object. Westphal makes the case that Kant's Transcendental Logic may provide us with a helpful conceptual primer here, as it

concerns the kinds of judgment (classification, differentiation, conditionalization) required to identify, distinguish, track and classify individuals perceived in our surroundings. Although Westphal is not the first philosopher to cull Kant's unity of consciousness as relevant to the binding problem, the case study strengthens Westphal judgment-first epistemological approach, with the *a priori* concepts space and time utilized to identify any (actual) region of space and period of time in which various particulars change, are perceived, and are arranged.

Chapter 8 and 9 are perhaps Westphal's strongest chapters. It is here that Kant's epistemological findings about perception and causal judgment crystalize, with Westphal elaborating on Kant's proofs of content externalism. It follows that any world in which human beings are capable of apperceptive experience is one that must provide us some minimal regularity and variety amongst the contents of our sensations. This is what allows us to make judgments by way of identifying objects or events, for it is by way of judgment, and not sense-data, that we can distinguish ourselves from the objects that populate our environs and achieve ap-perception (§51). Kant's semantic point about singular cognitive reference and the proof of mental content externalism are here reinforced by his proof that we can only make legitimate causal judgments about spatio-temporal particulars (viz., persisting substances) using our conceptual categories.

The final third of the book, titled Further Ramifications, comprises four chapters. Chapter 10 elaborates on the aforementioned thesis regarding scientific realism, which veers towards a programmatic Carnapian rendering. However, it is Westphal's consideration of the free will vs. determinism debate that occupies the bulk of the final chapters. Westphal approaches this debate qua metaphysics rather than metaethics and, as is characteristic of Westphal's reading—contra those interpreters who contend that Kant's compatibilism entails the truth of causal determinism and, thus, insist upon the wellspring of the noumenon for radical freedom—Westphal reads Kant's argument here without appealing to his transcendental idealism. Westphal argues that Kant reveals the entire free will vs. determinism debate as void, intractable, and an *argumentum ad ignorantium* (§§74-83). This will undoubtedly serve as the most controversial section for those Kant scholars who uphold the “two-worlds” view as key to linking Kant's practical and theoretical philosophy. Nevertheless, Westphal's judgment-first approach offers a robust conception of normativity, where “rational judgment is normatively structured insofar as it consists in critical assessment of justifying grounds, principles, evidence and our use of them in any specific judgment, and because the normative character of justificatory judgment cannot be reduced to, nor eliminated by, causal considerations” (288). In Chapters 11-12, Westphal argues that Kant's account of causal judgment suffices to preserve the possibility of free and imputable action at the psychological level. Westphal underscores that we can *only* make accurate and justifiable causal judgments about spatio-temporal particulars—causal knowledge results from successful, exclusively causal explanation of actual events but the principle of universal causal determinism is not, nor can be, a known causal law at the psychological register.

Reviewing Kant's Paralogisms of Pure Reason, Westphal asserts that we have well-justified causal beliefs *only* to the extent that we have credible evidence for causal explanation of events.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the transcendental causal principle, that every event has a cause, is a *regulative* principle of causal inquiry and we

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., A341–61, B399–413.

obtain causal knowledge only from successful causal explanation, which does not obtain for inner psychology (mental events). Mistaking the causal principle for a justified causal law is an instance of “transcendental subreption”, of “mistaking conditions for the possibility of human experience for substantive features of the world we experience” (167). Westphal emphasizes that Kant’s principles of causal judgment, as justified in the “Analogies”, only hold when referred to spatio-temporal substances; via *modus tollens*, causal judgment *cannot* be known to hold of merely psychological phenomena (§§45-46). Here, the physicalist may rejoinder: but inner psychology is composed of physical neural events, and thus spatio-temporal particulars-cum-substances which we can represent and use as positive empirical evidence given our contemporary brain-imaging techniques (e.g., fMRI, EKG)! Westphal does not consider such responses, leaving (naturalist) readers who might agree with Westphal’s sidelining Kant’s transcendental idealism teeming with such queries. Nevertheless, Westphal also takes a second approach to determinism, not via psychology but bodily behavior. Appealing to Kant’s transcendental justification of bodily comportment within perceptible judgment, Westphal claims that causal behavior is underinformed and that identifying causally interacting substances in our surroundings does not justify causal determinism universally across the domain of spatio-temporal events. Westphal links his conception of the freedom of behavior to the semantics of cognitive behavior via the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR)—that every event has a sufficient cause or causes—claiming that it suffices as a regulative principle guiding causal inquiry, causal explanation, and causal judgment; it is not, nor can it be, a principle known to hold constitutively of all events within space and time (§§79-80). Westphal warns against our mistaking the PSR for an “unrestricted universal, demonstrated (i.e., cognitively fully and unrestrictedly justified) assertoric *law of causality*” (299)—we must never mistake a *principle* of causal inquiry for successful *outcomes* of such inquiry.

Westphal underscores that Richard McCarty conflates the causal principle—that each spatio-temporal event has (a) numerically distinct spatio-temporal cause(s)—for an established assertoric causal law, whereby every event in fact has some sufficient set of causes.<sup>7</sup> Westphal responds that: “Kant’s Critical strictures on causal judgments within the merely temporal psychological domain entail that we cannot know pro or contra whether psychological phenomena are causally structured, or are causally deterministic” (321). Westphal is correct that a complete cause-and-effect schema will, necessarily, always be incomplete: enumerating a causally-closed map will forever be undermined by the nature of open systems, i.e., the fact that space and time are always present. But does this preclude reflection on causal determinism via best-inference? For Westphal, in the domain of human behavior, such attempts will make use of unjustified suppositions based on under-informed models, which are supplanted by highly abbreviated and short-hand causal commands.

Rather than relaying his critique to develop a metaethical doctrine separate from the Categorical Imperative and its noumenal purview, Westphal’s methodological concerns brings him to conclude the book by advocating scientific realism. This will, indeed, satisfy naturalist Kantians like myself who are favorable towards Sellars’ rendering. For Westphal, the supposition that mere logical possibilities undermine cognitive justification remains pervasive and props up

<sup>7</sup> McCarty, R. 2009, *Kant’s Theory of Action*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

cognitive skepticism, tendering multitudinous concerns in epistemology and philosophy of mind like the “hard problem” of consciousness, which trade in logical possibilities rather than demonstrative reference. Westphal’s critique is leveled at philosophical methodologies that ascribe various characteristics to something that does not suffice for any actual ascription—as delineated by the semantics of cognitive reference, actual ascription always requires localizing relevant particular(s) sufficiently to discriminate them.

For Westphal, the conjoint implication of the Analogies of Experience and the Paralogisms of Rational Psychology is that we cannot make any legitimate, justifiable causal judgments about internal, psychological, or temporal states/occurrences. While there may loom large the impulse to project the universal determinist principle of binding causality from the constitutive principle of objective experience, Westphal is quick to remind us that this is what Kant criticized as “transcendental subreption”—mistaking transcendental conditions of the possibility of apperceptive human experience and knowledge for ontological conditions constitutive of spatio-temporal objects. Westphal conclusively claims that the debate of determinism vs. free will is not only deeply unsatisfactory but an empty question; philosophy would do better to engage in exercises of specific judgment or matters of action via the compatibilist framework that asks “[t]o what extent, or in what regard(s) is each action free?” (304). One hopes, however, that Westphal is not content with deeming the entire Kantian-metaethical purview of practical philosophy an altogether empty pursuit—it is here that the reader may underscore that the determinism vs. free will debate is tethered to critical questions concerning responsibility, culpability, and freedom. This debate informs our evaluative norms, reactive attitudes, and pragmatics, down to influencing jurisprudence and legislation; opting out of the debate may not be a choice when so much of our moral system is carved around it. Considering that reasons for doing are never categorially given, like sense-data, and that no moral particulars can be identified *a priori*, Westphal’s prescription risks lapsing into abdication. Although Westphal is not a moral philosopher, having stepped into the metaethical boxing ring, the onus looms large for Westphal, and us as his readers, to grapple with how, and if, a judgment-first epistemology obtains in the metaethical terrain. Despite this query—which Westphal’s construction very well may provide an answer to, although it must be made explicit—Westphal’s epistemological rendering of Kant, particularly his work on cognitive semantics and content externalism, achieves the goal of proving Kant a meticulous epistemologist.

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