

Marcus Willaschek: *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics: The Dialectic of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press 2018, 298 pp.

Willaschek's important book has caused many echoes since 2018 throughout the academic world, including several reviews in different languages and a discussion between Paul Guyer, Andrew Chignell and the author himself in the *Kantian Review* (issue 25/2, 2020). The voices seem to be in a loud and flawless unison: there is no way to get past this book for anyone seriously working on the field of metaphysics and the transcendental dialectic, or for anyone who wants to challenge even its most constructive sides. Not only does Willaschek—along with Neiman (1994), Grier (2001), Klimmek (2005), Pissis (2012), Anderson (2015), Kreines (2015), Bunte (2016) and Meer (2019)—blow the dust off the one of the most central and valuable topics in Kant and Kant research. He offers a genuinely new perspective and a series of creative exegetical variations, comparable to Lyapunov's reflections upon Liszt's *Transcendental Études*.

Here is how Willaschek proceeds:¹ (A) He steps back from a rather traditional approach to the *Transcendental Dialectic*, i.e. the *immediate* jump to close (con-)textual reconstruction of the main theses and their historical roots, by taking a healthy distance and bringing up a more basic question, namely: Why do we ask metaphysical questions anyway? The answer cannot be that we somehow unnaturally force this task onto us (why should we?). The metaphysical questions are inevitable and per se innocent consequences of our daily and scientific rational activities. Our rationality is characterized by three features (1, 6): (i) *discursivity*, (ii) *iteration*, and (iii) *completeness*. A detective (i) thinks in concepts, (ii) asks persistently how a is related to b and b to c, and (iii) eventually finds the whole picture and solves an issue. The same operations connected in more extensive chains and larger pictures lead to purported answers to metaphysical inquiries. Willaschek provokingly claims that the *sources* of metaphysics lie within this domain of natural rationality (5):

RS-1 Rational reflection on empirical questions necessarily raises *metaphysical questions* about 'the unconditioned.'

RS-2 Rational reflection (by 'pure reason') on these metaphysical questions necessarily leads to *metaphysical answers* that appear to be rationally warranted.

RS-3 The rational principles that lead from empirical to metaphysical questions and from there to metaphysical answers are principles of '*universal human reason*'; that is, they belong to rational thinking as such.

¹ I will use capital letters (A)-(F) to indicate where I see a point that can be considered as a novelty in Kant-research.

The author's main goal is to find and analyze the concrete shapes that the basic *Rational Sources Account* (RS-1-3) takes throughout the course of Kant's *Transcendental Dialectic* (TD), thereby showing how metaphysics is grounded in the latter.

(B) In his reconstruction of Kant's theory of reason and transcendental ideas Willaschek sharply distinguishes (and interrelates) two strands: the destructive and the constructive (10). It is important to stress that in the history of Kant research, the *Transcendental Aesthetic* and *Analytic* gained far more attention, which may be a consequence of the persistent influence of the research interests of Neo-Kantians on the one hand (36) and the (presently fading) anti-metaphysical atmosphere (13) on the other hand. The author aims at breaking with this tradition by elaborating both sides of Kant's endeavor. The novelty of such approach can be questioned.² But indeed, Willaschek should be given credit for his systematic reconstruction of the whole TD in the light of the basic rational sources of metaphysical speculation, even in contrast to a monograph he could not consider, Meer (2019), which brilliantly analyzes the regulative functions of transcendental ideas in the Appendix and their importance in context of Kant's account of rational sciences.

(C) These sources reappear on four levels (L1-4) in the TD and give structure to Willaschek's book. (L1) In the *Introduction* to the TD, Kant is concerned with the transition from the *logical maxim* (find condition for each conditioned cognition) to the *supreme principle of reason* (when something conditioned is given, then so is the whole series of conditions, which itself is unconditioned). Willaschek reads this passage as a specific formulation of the RS-1-3: the logical maxim represents our natural discursive and iterative rational activity, which, driven by its need for completeness, eventually assumes the givenness of a complete set of conditions, and therefore dares to leap into the domain of metaphysics. Given its importance and difficulty, he dedicates the whole Part I with chapters 1 to 5 (17-162), which makes up more than a half of his book, to a close analysis of the "transition passage" alone. To show how *reason* creates *metaphysics*, Willaschek starts with preliminary explanations of the logic and the historical background of both concepts (chapter 1), arguing that while they seem to be made for each other (44), hence could be understood as mere constructs, it is possible to show that the basic rational activities necessarily lead to speculation. This rather introductory chapter is followed by an analysis and an up-to-date-reformulation of the logical maxim as a common ground (65) of the everyday rationality and the rationality used by scientists and philosophers (chapter 2). The "givenness" of the whole series of conditions, as the supreme principle demands, should

² See author's own remark (11, footnote 7).

be understood ontologically (of a real object), not epistemically (of a concept) (73), as Willaschek suggests next (chapter 3). And this givenness can be claimed in two ways: as unconditioned condition or as totality of conditioned conditions (91). The task of the further reconstruction is to bring (i) the logical maxim and (ii) the supreme principle together. In the chapter 4, the author argues for the importance of differentiating between a regulative and a constitutive use of the supreme principle ((ii reg.) and (ii const.) respectively). While the transition from (i) to (ii reg.) is legitimate, the jump from (ii reg.) to (ii const.) is natural, but illegitimate (125). In the chapter 5 both ways are analyzed step-by-step, whereby (D) Willaschek argues that the illegitimate transition leading to transcendental illusion is caused by a tacit assumption that our thought of the real objects corresponds to the structure of reality. Kant must have assumed (as a part of the *Rational Sources Account*) that everyone is naturally committed to “transcendental realism”—which, in contrast to “transcendental idealism”, purports the ability to cognize things-in-themselves.³

In part II (163-269, chapters 6-9), Willaschek analyzes the next three levels, on which the *Rational Sources Account* reappears. The *Book One* of the *TD*, (L2), is dedicated to the system of transcendental ideas (chapter 6). Against a usual interpretation and Kant’s own wording (E), Willaschek holds (170-175) that the “metaphysical deduction” of the transcendental ideas as *inferred* concepts is accomplished only in *Book Two* of the *TD*. In the first book he rather derives the concept of the unconditioned as a common title of all (F) “nine” ideas, which deserve the technical term “transcendental” (167-170): the soul as substance, simple, unity and spiritual; the world as containing complete composition, division, origin(s) and dependence; and God as *ens realissimum*. While the relation of the *Rational Sources Account* to the *Book One* is somewhat concealed and reflects the “transition issue” discussed in the *Introduction* to the *TD* (185-186), the dialectic fallacies that Willaschek analyzes in chapters 7 and 8, (L3), show more obviously how all nine inferred transcendental ideas are based on the “universal human reason”. Take the paralogism of substantiality—the thinking of myself as a rational being naturally places the “I” in the subject position just as a substance that bears the predicates: “the thought that I might be an attribute of something else does not seem to make sense: my thoughts inhere in me, but *I* do not inhere in anything else” (191). Of course, inferring the transcendental ideas, reason is naturally deluded by supposing that it cognizes the things as they are. After discussing the constitutive use of ideas that Kant describes in *Appendix*, (L4), Willaschek comes back to the analysis of “transcendental realism” in chapter 9, before ending his book with a short postscript on Kant’s practical metaphysics.

³ For an insightful discussion on this topic see Chignell (2020) and Willaschek (2020: 306-310).

This overview shows only a small part of novel, promising, and sometimes provocative analyses Willaschek delivers. Instead of starting an extensive discussion, I want to offer the reader—in a bullet point form—a few more perspectives and suggestions that do not coincide with what she will find in Willaschek’s book:⁴

1) The wide horizon established by author’s recourse to the basic rational sources could become much wider if he would consider the *TD* in context of a larger account of reason in the narrow sense that produces at least 7 different types of ideas with immanent functions (postulates, transcendental concepts of reason, other theoretical, practical (moral, religious and political), aesthetical and architectonic⁵ ideas as well as pure concepts that represent the reason itself).

2) Can one defend Kant’s *constructive* account of metaphysics without even engaging in discussions of concrete critique uttered against it? By referring, for instance, to the argument of “naturalness” of rational sources or Kant’s concept of faculties, which both remain unquestioned throughout his book, Willaschek risks speaking only to an upfront well-disposed readership.

3) Willaschek’s explicitly mentioned exegetical maxim, not to touch anything that is too problematic and brief to avoid a reading that would be “highly speculative” (172), should be a subject of disagreement. First, consider how he himself violates it by claiming out of one single, unpublished passage (*Reflexion 5553*) that the transcendental ideal, unlike other ideas, appears only in one mode, *qua ens realissimum* (169), and contradicts an extensive study of Klimmek (2005). This study is backed up by Bunte (2016), which Willaschek does not mention. Second, and vice versa, consider passages that he elegantly circumvents, but which may offer keys to a better understanding of the *TD*. For instance, a) the categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive chains of inferences in relation to *subject, object, or both*, as prototypes of *soul, world, and God* (A323/B379-380); b) Kant’s first introduction of the *real* use of reason that—against Willaschek’s ontological interpretation (73)—leads to *concepts* and *principles* (A299/B355); and c) Kant’s explicitly claimed possibility of *intuitive use of reason* (via construction of concepts) (A719/B747)—introducing Kant’s general account of reason, Willaschek first blocks this passage out, claiming that it operates solely discursively (36), and then brings it in for the purpose of explaining the relation between mathematics and philosophy, but leaving out the terms “intuitive” and “use of reason” (37).

These concerns are not meant to diminish the value of Willaschek’s great book. It deserves—to end how I started: with acoustic metaphors—many new ears willing to admit that what they

⁴ These points are partially considered in Lewin (forthcoming).

⁵ See Lewin (2020).

hear is sound, defensible, and resonates perfectly with present days. But also ears that will hear out some dissonances and missing tones, fostering further discussions on Kant's set of theories related to ideas of reason.

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