

Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* Harvard University Press, 2005, 440pp., ISBN 0-674-01888-5.

The character and significance of the philosophical problems driving onto-theological claims, from Leibniz through Kant to German idealism, is the principle concern of this comprehensive and rigorously argued book. Such onto-theological claims arise from the demand for an absolute ground ensuring the completeness of a philosophical system. Without this completeness, any justification given from an empirical standpoint is subject to the “Agrippan trilemma,” namely, such a claim winds up being either a) a brute assertion, b) a justification that itself requires a ground (such that the search for justificatory grounds is subject to an infinite regress), or c) it is a justification that begs the question, presupposing precisely what it is supposed to establish. Franks argues that this trilemma can arise “whenever what is at stake is the nature of reasons, which need not only be reasons why someone believes something, but may also be reasons why someone should do something, or reasons why something is the something it is” (18-19). He reads Kant’s undertaking, as well as that of his immediate successors, in light of the search for completeness in justification, and hence as a quest to escape the Agrippan trilemma. Franks understands his own project as an investigation of “the constitution of the problems to which the German idealist systematization project is a response,” and as an assessment of the “relationship between these problems and the questions motivating Kant” (6).

While the book’s principle focus is Kant and the post-Kantians, Leibniz’s role in setting up the philosophical problems to which Kant and his successors were to respond plays a foundational role at the start of the book. Hence Franks understands both what he calls “Derivation Monism” and “Kantian dualism” as attempts to answer a fundamental problem thematized by Leibniz and stemming from the attempt to meet two conflicting demands. The first one, which he calls the Monistic Demand, arises from an attempt to avoid the Agrippan trilemma by having every genuine ground “participate in a single systematic unity of grounds, terminating in a single, absolute ground” (20). The second, which he calls the Dualistic Demand, stems from the requirement of modern science that all events be explainable in naturalistic terms, that is, in terms of the physical laws

governing natural phenomena. Hence the Dualistic Demand amounts to the requirement “that physical grounding and metaphysical grounding be kept rigorously separate” (20). As such, proper explanations for natural phenomena cannot appeal to the supersensible. Absolute grounds are nowhere to be found among empirical items, and the demand for closure in the explanation of physical phenomena therefore seems to preclude the possibility for absolute grounding. Leibniz’s solution to this problem involves the derivation of all relational properties (and hence the explanation of how all empirical phenomena relate to one another) from a substance’s intrinsic properties. Substances, in turn, receive their absolute grounding in God. Leibniz’s derivation of relational properties from intrinsic properties, however, depends upon the fact that the monads are “windowless” and do not, at the metaphysical level, *actually* relate to one another. All physical relations are merely “well-founded phenomena.” At the phenomenal level, physical science can inquire into the grounds of such phenomena without having to invoke the supersensible for an answer; however, all phenomena are ultimately, metaphysically grounded in the monads, themselves grounded in God.

In his first chapter, “Kantian Dualism,” Franks argues convincingly that many of the problems driving Leibniz’s system are also concerns to which Kant is responsive: both Kant’s pre-critical and critical projects were designed to meet both Monistic and Dualistic Demands. Kant’s project, however, is to meet both demands while at the same time thinking of substances as genuinely interacting. The distinction between phenomena and noumena is Kant’s solution to the problem of meeting both demands: individuals with intrinsic properties are posited at the noumenal level, but all properties of things that appear are inherently relational. A key problem is then how to interpret Kant’s appearances and things in themselves and the relation between them. Franks argues against a “two methods interpretation,” as well as against Henry Allison’s dual aspect view, opting instead for Karl Amerik’s sophisticated “two essences view,” which understands Kant as responsive to Leibniz’s demand for two orders of grounding in order to adequately meet both demands. As such, “to ask whether the in itself and the appearance are two aspects or two entities is to presuppose falsely that a single method of individuation and counting may be applied to both the noumenal and the phenomenal” (51). Attention to the distinct character of each order of grounding shows that no single

method of individuation and counting is applicable. Franks then reconstructs Kant's metaphysical deduction, arguing that for Kant after 1786 the idea of the *ens realissimum* is the necessary presupposition grounding the possibility of finite things, themselves arrived at through limitation. As such, Kant's philosophy meets the requirement of Derivation Monism that "the *a priori* conditions of experience must be somehow derived from a single, absolute first principle" (85). In the rest of the book he will argue that the German idealists, like Kant, are concerned with satisfying both the Duality Demand and the Monistic Demand. German idealists are, however, unlike Kant in the way that each think of the *relata* (83).

Chapter two provides a brilliant analysis of how problems in Kant's philosophy lead to Holistic Monism, the view that a) "empirical items must be such that their properties are determinable only within the context of a totality composed of other items and their properties" (85) and b) "the absolute first principle must be immanent within the aforementioned totality, as its principle of totality" (85). Franks shows how Jacobi's writings on Spinozism in 1785 had a decisive effect on the way that Kant was read, and explores claims by individuals such as Hermann Andreas Pistorius, who thought they had found a "deduction of Spinozism" in Kant's philosophy: multiplicity is to be found only at the phenomenal sphere, but at the noumenal level there is only "only one sole substance, and this is the sole thing in itself" (95). Driven by practical concerns, Kant rejected Monism and affirmed Monadic Individualism. Franks takes pains to reconstruct Kant's argument that Spinozism is inevitable only if space and time are considered to be features of things in themselves; insofar as they are considered transcendently ideal, there is room for affirming a plurality of individual substances at the noumenal level. Nevertheless, Franks argues that the problem remains whether Kant succeeds in relating the two orders of grounding. Phenomena occurring in space and time are irreducibly relational: they can be conceived only through their relational properties, and hence in terms of how they relate to all other phenomena. Only noumena can be conceived of through their intrinsic properties. But then the problem becomes that "if you consider something solely as substance—as something whose activity is intelligible in virtue of its intrinsic properties alone—then you cannot, through that consideration, explain any of the thing's spatial, temporal, or causal properties, for all of those things are irreducibly

relational” (120). Furthermore, if a single absolute is already available to explain everything else, then the notion of multiple substances having intrinsic properties does no explanatory work in grounding relational properties that is not already being done by the absolute first principle.

The problem is picked up once again in chapter three, this time in relation to the post-Kantian skepticism of both Jacobi and Maimon. The initial skeptical dilemma posed by Jacobi—that Kant cannot get beyond internal representations to the things that exist outside us—is shown to rest on a failure to adequately distinguish between transcendental and empirical standpoints. Nevertheless, Franks argues that Jacobian skepticism can be reformulated in a way that is not so easily dismissed. This problem springs from the standpoint of ordinary human life. If everything that appears is irreducibly relational, what room is there, then, for the individual and the facts of moral consciousness attendant upon her? That is, “if things in themselves do not manifest their natures in perception, then in what sense can they be things that appear?” (172). This leads to the question, “how is everyday knowledge of individual things and persons so much as possible?” (173). The gap between things in themselves and appearances is of momentous significance: both self and world are thoroughly empirically determined from the ordinary human standpoint. As such, the self can only be grasped in and through its relation to the world. However, if the self is thought of as completely constituted by these relations, the individual as such disappears. Positing noumenal individuals seems to be of little help—they are unknown and unknowable, and it is unclear how noumenal entities relate to empirical selves, especially in regard to moral development. Franks thereby reads German idealism as attempting to provide an answer to the question of how “a locus of agency can be constituted through reciprocal interactions” (174).

The methods of argumentation employed by German idealists is the subject of the fourth chapter, “Post-Kantian Transcendental Arguments.” What constraints do the problems explored in earlier chapters impose on methods of argumentation? Franks characterizes a transcendental argument as issuing in “some *conditional* to the effect that some *conditioned* would be impossible except for some *condition*” (204) and breaks down his analysis of transcendental arguments in three parts: an analysis of the conditional, the conditioned, and the condition. Furthermore, given that German idealist

transcendental arguments are concerned to exhibit unconditioned justification, there are two ways of arguing for this justification: the first is a *progressive* transcendental argument, which proceeds from ground to grounded, and the second is a regressive transcendental argument, regressing from grounded to ground. Discussion of these issues is applied in a subtle and sophisticated manner to Reinhold's first principle that "in consciousness representation is distinguished through the subject from both object and subject and is referred to both" (219). Franks provides a thorough analysis of the influence of Reinhold in shaping the methods of German idealism. Taking on much of the contemporary Anglophone literature on the relation of Reinhold to Fichte, Franks discusses Reinhold in relation to Fichte and Schulze, showing that Fichte's problem with Reinhold was not that Reinhold failed to see that representation presupposes immediate self-consciousness. Rather, Fichte recognized that the problem with Reinhold's principle of consciousness is its ambiguous character: the "fact of consciousness" on which it is founded is supposed to function both as "self-explanatory and therefore as heterogeneous to what it conditions," and as "self-evident through 'empirical self-observation,' and therefore homogeneous with what it conditions" (235). As the ultimate ground of all self-consciousness, the principle is supposed to function transcendently as grounding everything accessible to consciousness. However, because Reinhold also thinks it can be accessed through empirical self observation, he winds up treating it as just another item accessible to consciousness, homogeneous with all other contents of consciousness. Fichte's solution is to affirm that the first principle expresses an *act* constituting consciousness. As such, his argument is a progressive one that posits an unconditioned constitutive act that progresses to conditioneds that are heterogeneous with it. Only those German idealists—such as Fichte— that choose *progressive* arguments "offer any hope of responding to Agrippan and post-Kantian skepticism" (258). However, to proceed in this manner is to "abandon Reinhold's goal of universal intelligibility" (258).

In his fifth chapter "The Fact of Reason," Franks provides a penetrating analysis of Fichte's central claim that what grounds the capacity of attaching the "I think" to all one's representations is the "act of self-positing as positing" (307). He begins with a Fichtean reading of Kant's "fact of reason:" this fact is not simply a consciousness of the moral law, but a fundamental *act* of valuation that cannot be explained in terms of

empirically conditioned desires. As such a fundamental act, it is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom. Kant's deduction of freedom is thereby understood as "soliciting a first person, singular pure act or *Tathandlung* that manifests itself sensibly and that enables a response to skepticism" (293). This reading of Kant's practical philosophy becomes the interpretive key to Fichte: the act of self-positing as positing is the recognition of the self as an agent that thinks and acts from a given first-person existential location. As such, "immediate actuality is an existential commitment with respect to oneself as the agent engaged in making existential commitments, predications or inferences" (307). This is a "real first principle that is both immanent within and foundational for every act of consciousness" (318). Stress on this existential, first person point of view highlights the fact that all knowledge has a valuational component, that is, it is always the knowledge *of* a particular self who is committed to certain projects. Contra Ameriks and Neuhauser, Franks understands Fichte as dispensing with the traditional distinction between the practical and the theoretical; instead Fichte inserts "the practical into the theoretical" (317).

Given this starting point, Franks argues that Fichte's project is to understand how the "origination of individuality is possible without invoking intrinsic properties, hence to show that Holistic Monism does not lead to nihilism" (323). Immediate self-consciousness is achieved through the summons of the other; as such, self-consciousness is revealed to be irreducibly relational. While the last point recapitulates a theme present throughout the whole book, Franks does not develop it sufficiently in relation to Fichte and the other German idealists, and does not give a convincing account of how Fichte can *both* remain committed to Holistic Monism while saving individuality. Is there really a meaningful sense in which we can speak of the individual while eliminating intrinsic properties altogether? The last chapter picks the theme up again: for Fichte individual freedom is a "derivative aspect of pure will, which serves as the principle of a Holistic Monist system that necessarily includes both other subjects and external objects" (364). Furthermore, the common source of the harmony of free subjects is a pure will constituting the medium of their interaction. This move to conceive pure will as the immanent principle of a single world system marks Fichte's move from subjective to absolute idealism after 1800.

In his final chapter on “Intuition, Negation, and the Possibility of Evil,” Franks discusses the relation between the competing methods of “construction in intellectual, transcendental or speculative intuition” and “dialectic or determinate negation” (338). Franks attempts to distinguish between the Kant’s Monadic Individualism and Holistic Monism by affirming that for Kant “things in themselves are individuated by positive determinations, which are limitations of divine originals.” For the German idealists, on the other hand, “what God cognizes when he cognizes Himself by intellectual intuition are the fundamental forms of ontologically determinate negation” (340). The problem with Franks’ account is that for Kant the category of limitation is arrived at through a negation of a reality, and it is thereby not clear how differences between negation and limitation are going to help us to make meaningful distinctions between Kantian ontotheology and that of the German idealists. The chapter goes on to discuss how Hegel and Schelling’s criticisms of Fichte propelled them to develop their own systems. Hegel, for instance, criticized Fichte as “a subjective idealist who cannot establish the absolute grounding of natural science.” If complete systematicity is to be achieved, then nature, too, must be provided an absolute grounding not subject to the Agrippan trilemma. Hence, “the first principle...must be equally capable of expression both in rational agency and in nature” (371).

As Franks notes in his concluding chapter, his work is intended as a corrective to “impressive recent commentaries that seek either to downplay the importance of theology” in the work of the German idealists, “or to read their overtly theological claims as claims about the structure of human community.” Those ways of reading the German idealists “underestimate the central importance of ontotheology—notably the identification of God as the absolute first principle required for an escape from the Agrippan trilemma—for the German idealist program in its most fundamental formulations” (390). The book achieves its intended goal brilliantly. Franks recounts with impressive detail and unparalleled clarity how the search for absolute grounds played itself out in both the practical and theoretical philosophy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The work is notable for its clarity in dealing with a subject that too easily lends itself to obscurantism, its impressive command of a wide range of both primary and secondary

literature, and especially for its ability to couch the concerns of the German idealists in language that is also accessible to philosophers trained in the analytic tradition.

Given the subject matter of the book, a glaring lacuna is its bypassing of the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Nevertheless, the problems that Franks identifies as central concerns of the German idealists can be used fruitfully in trying to understand the main problems that Schleiermacher addressed in both his philosophy and his theology. In particular, Franks' treatment of Fichte—the best available in the Anglophone literature—should help to reveal the extent to which Schleiermacher was in fact indebted to him, as well as the ways he departed from his philosophy. Despite the omission of Schleiermacher from the book, *All or Nothing* is no doubt the most rigorously argued book available on this period in German philosophy. Any philosopher or theologian wanting to seriously come to grips with the philosophical and ontotheological issues driving theological discourse in the nineteenth century will be well advised to consult it.