

*Three Problems in Westphal's Transcendental Proof of Realism*¹

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1. Lead-in

In his book *Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism*² Kenneth R. Westphal has two main goals: to provide a sound transcendental proof for (unqualified) realism (or realism *sans phrase*) on the basis of Kant's philosophical work, and to show that this proof serves to undermine Kant's own transcendental idealism – of which Westphal adopts a dual-aspect metaphysical interpretation. In this article I will present three serious problems in his undertaking. Since there are reviews of Westphal's book available, I will not offer one here.³

I take Westphal to argue for his theses roughly in three steps. The first step aims to show that noumenal causation, i.e., the idea that the thing in itself causally affects our sensibility and thus contributes to the arising of appearances, is both coherent in and necessary for Kant's transcendental idealism. In the second step he aims to undermine Kant's transcendental idealism by two major arguments: first, that it cannot account for transcendental affinity, i.e., the associability of the matter of experience, and second, that it fails to satisfactorily counter Hume's scepticism concerning the reality of causality. The final step is to show that Westphal's own so-called “neglected alternative” solves these problems without resorting to transcendental idealism.

By “neglected alternative” Westphal refers to Kant's disjunctive syllogism that either laws of nature are “drawn from nature by means of experience” (empiricism) or they are “derived from the laws of the possibility of experience in general”⁴ (transcendental idealism).⁵ The neglected alternative would on this account be a third possibility for explaining the lawfulness of experience (originally “neglected alternative” was about the status of space and time). Westphal's own suggestion is that “our cognitive capacities [are] such that we are only receptive, sensitive, or cognitively competent with regard to certain kinds of objects, although those objects would have the properties (whatever they may be) that enable us to experience them, regardless of whether we existed or experienced them”⁶. I will not assess Westphal's proposed neglected alternative in this paper, but concentrate instead on how he purports to ground it.

¹ The English translations of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* are taken from Guyer, Paul & Wood, Allen W.: *Critique of Pure Reason*. Cambridge 1998.

² Westphal, Kenneth R.: *Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism*. Cambridge 2004. Henceforth abbreviated as KTPR.

³ See e.g. Look, Brandon: “*Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism* (review)”. In: *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. Vol. 44, 4/2006, 665f; Allais, Lucy: “Review of Kenneth Westphal, *Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism*”. In: *The British Journal for the History of Philosophy*. Vol. 14, 1/2006; Hall, Bryan: “*Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism*, by Kenneth Westphal”. In: *Kantian Review*. Vol. 11, 2006, 127-30.

⁴ KTPR, 83.

⁵ Cf. *Prolegomena*, AA 04: 319. See also: Kemp Smith, Norman: *A Commentary to Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason"*. 2nd edition, New York 1962 (1923), 113.

⁶ KTPR, 84.

Should all these steps succeed, Westphal would both refute Kant's transcendental idealism and prove realism once and for all via transcendental argumentation. Unfortunately, as I will show, his arguments are severely lacking. In demonstrating this I will proceed step-by-step in accordance with the division to three phases introduced above.

2. *Noumenal Causation*

The most memorable formulation of the problem of noumenal causation is provided by Kant's contemporary, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi:

Without the presupposition [of the thing in itself] I cannot enter the system, and with the presupposition I cannot remain in it.⁷

The idea is that Kant's system of transcendental idealism cannot even begin to function without the thing in itself somehow influencing the sensibility, but this sort of supersensible affection cannot be assumed within the framework of his system. As causality is one of the categories of the understanding, it cannot pertain to the thing in itself.

Most defenders of Kant have attempted to circumvent the problem (e.g. Henry Allison with his transcendental affection⁸), but Westphal cannot resort to such a strategy. If he is to prove genuine realism⁹ on the basis of Kant's transcendental argumentation, the problem Jacobi identifies must be overcome one way or another. This is because he must be able to hold on to things in themselves to explain how sensations are possible in the first place, even while avoiding the transcendently idealistic way of explaining causation as merely one of the ways in which the human mind organises its experiences.

Westphal's ambitious argument for noumenal causation can be divided into three parts. (1) Noumenal causation is logically coherent, (2) it is necessary for Kant's philosophy and (3) it can be given a positive proof within Kant's system.¹⁰

⁷ Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich: *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus and Realismus*. In: F. Roth & F. Köppen (eds.), *Werke*, vol. 2. Darmstadt 1968, 304.

⁸ See Allison, Henry E.: *Kant's Transcendental Idealism, an Interpretation and Defense*, revised and enlarged edition. New Haven and London 2004, 64-73.

⁹ Westphal's use of the word "realism" is at times somewhat rhetorical. By "genuine realism" Westphal refers to his unqualified realism, but one might ask what makes the realism Kant attempted to uphold less "genuine" than Westphal's alternative. Also, Westphal takes "realism" to be something Kant argued against (e.g. KTPR, 90), which is surely problematic. It is my contention that Kant's point in differentiating between empirical and transcendental realism is that using the term "realism" for both is bound to lead to the problems faced by his predecessors. Westphal's decision to drop the qualifications of realism makes it very difficult to see what sort of realism he means in different contexts. Since his realism *sans phrase* is at least to my mind very closely related to if not identical with transcendental realism, dropping the qualification "transcendental" seems to confuse matters needlessly.

¹⁰ KTPR, 38, 63-66.

2. 1. Meaningfulness of Noumenal Causation

One of the most interesting parts in Westphal's book is his analysis of Kant's semantics. He labours to show that the underestimation of Kant's abilities in philosophy of language has led to ignoring one extremely important factor, namely that in addition to a form, the categories have a content as well. Westphal takes two citations from Kant: "[A category] can never yield *a priori* more than the mere rule of the synthesis of that which perception may give *a posteriori*"¹¹, and: "[They] lose all meaning [*Bedeutung*] and are empty titles for concepts without any content when with them I venture outside the field of sense"^{12, 13}.

According to Westphal, for Kant *objective validity* requires that, in order for a concept to be *fully* meaningful, it must be able to refer to actual or possible objects in our experience. But Westphal adds that for Kant meaningfulness divides into two components, of which referentiality is but one. The other component has to do with the "functions of unity" of categories, i.e., their role as synthesisers of intuitions.¹⁴

Westphal is here claiming that while categories as such do not have full significance, since they lack empirical significance which they have when they are applied to empirical objects, they still have *logical significance*.¹⁵ Kant himself speaks of the *transcendental significance* (*transzendente Bedeutung*) of categories,¹⁶ which, according to Westphal, is exactly the same as their transcendental or logical *content*.¹⁷ Briefly put, this would mean that categories are not totally meaningless when applied to non-sensible objects. To Westphal's mind, this shows that it is by no means incoherent to apply the category of causality to the thing in itself.

However, when we take a look at the context¹⁸ in which Kant speaks of the transcendental significance of categories, we see that he intends it in a purely negative sense to oppose their application beyond sensible objects (as was done in traditional metaphysics). Westphal is aware of this: he tries to show that categories have transcendental use merely in the sense that they allow noumena¹⁹ to be *thought*, not (*contra* traditional metaphysics) *known*.²⁰

¹¹ "[Die Kategorie] kann nichts weiter, als die bloße Regel der Synthesis desjenigen, was die Wahrnehmung *a posteriori* geben mag" (KrV, A 720/B 748).

¹² "[Die] verlieren alle Bedeutung, und sind leere Titel zu Begriffen, ohne allen Inhalt, wenn ich mich außer dem Felde der Sinne damit hinauswage" (KrV, A 679/B 707).

¹³ These citations were originally picked by Eric C. Sandberg ("Thinking Things in Themselves". In: G. Funke & T. Seebohm (eds.), *Proceedings of the Sixth International Kant Congress*. Lanham (Md.) 1989, 26.), whom Westphal here criticises (KTPR, 43, 43n).

¹⁴ KTPR, 43.

¹⁵ Cf. KTPR, 46.

¹⁶ KrV, A 248/B 305.

¹⁷ KTPR, 48f.

¹⁸ KrV, A 248/B 304f.

¹⁹ Westphal haphazardly equates the noumenon and the thing in itself. In this paper I will not dwell on the problems that ensue from this questionable move. On the possible difference between these two concepts (and that of transcendental object), see e.g. Allison, Henry E.: *Kant's Transcendental Idealism, an Interpretation and Defense*, revised and enlarged edition. New Haven and London 2004, 50-64.

²⁰ KTPR, 47-50.

Westphal's use of the word "content" should be viewed with some reservation. While he supports this by remarking that if categories had no transcendental content, then they could not be distinguished from one another,²¹ Kant's own explications²² suggest that categories ought to be distinguished from one other based on their *form*. However, the situation is admittedly unclear since Kant does indeed speak of "transcendental content" of categories, albeit rather ambiguously.²³ This at least suggests that Westphal may be right. In any case, what Westphal here shows is that categories can be applied also transcendentially, although this use is merely logical, empty "play of thought" if you will.

2. 2. *The Necessity of Noumenal Causation*

Westphal submits that the transcendental significance of categories is necessary for Kant's transcendental idealism because things in themselves are reached via transcendental reflection²⁴, which according to Westphal in turn requires the application of categories to non-sensible noumena. If categories used in this way had no meaning, there would be none for the thing in itself either. But it is necessary for Kant's analysis of cognition that the thing in itself can be thought, one way or another.²⁵

The main idea of this chain of reasoning is that insofar as Kant speaks of noumena or things in themselves *at all*, he must at least *think* about them,²⁶ which he could not do if categories had no meaning when applied transphenomenally. Therefore, to Westphal, it is clear that the transcendental significance of categories is necessary for the whole of Kant's transcendental method: insofar as causality is a category, it is necessary to apply it to things in themselves.²⁷

I believe he is correct in a sense. Reflection on our transcendental forms of cognition, which is necessary for transcendental idealism, requires such counterfactual thought-experiments in which different categories are "tested" on certain ideas in order to determine their possibility. However, since transphenomenally applied categories have only logical, not empirical, significance, they have no *proper* content when used in this manner: they are merely empty constructions of thought. The misleading use of the term "content" cannot change this. So it must be concluded that even though Westphal is technically correct in that categories can be applied to beings of thought independently of experience, nothing has been achieved here that would surpass Kant's own insistence that, thus used, they are only "empty titles for concepts without any content"²⁸.

²¹ KTPR, 43.

²² E.g. KrV, A 248/B 305.

²³ See e.g. KrV, A 79/B 105.

²⁴ While I appreciate the emphasis Westphal puts on Kant's transcendental reflection, I find his account of it regrettably careless. He does not seem to sufficiently distinguish between transcendental reflection and reflection in general. Because Kant gives a very precise and restricted definition for transcendental reflection (KrV, A 261/B 317), it cannot be (at least uncritically) treated as mere reflection directed at our transcendental forms of cognition. Apart from my decision to not use the term myself, this problem is bypassed in this article.

²⁵ KTPR, 50f.

²⁶ It is worth remarking that this much is said by Kant himself. See e.g. KrV, Bxxvi-xxvii.

²⁷ KTPR, 51.

²⁸ KrV, A 679/B 707.

2. 3. *The Proof of Noumenal Causation*

Westphal is fully aware that since noumenal causation is not sensible, it cannot occur in space or time – those being the forms of sensibility. In effect this means that it must be *atemporal* and *aspatial* causation, in which case we lose for instance the idea that cause temporally precedes its effect. For things in themselves he postulates r-temporality (from the word *real*) which is analogous to temporality of appearances. He claims that even though he cannot formulate a proof for r-temporality (or for r-spatiality), it cannot at least be dismissed out of hand – otherwise illegitimate, positive claims about the thing in itself would be made. R-temporality makes it possible for Westphal to handle noumenal causation.²⁹ In other words, the idea is that since the thought of causality essentially involves some kind of thought of precedence and succession that cannot in noumenal causation be expressed temporally, alternative means for preserving this idea must be developed. This r-temporality is quite clearly a neglected alternative, and analogous to temporality. Even more importantly, it is merely *formally* analogous, since it reproduces only the formal order of temporality.

It is true that Westphal's stance is irrefutable, for should it be argued that he is in error, something substantial about the thing in itself would consequently be claimed. On the other hand it must be said, paralleling Allison in his response to Lorne Falkenstein's similar position,³⁰ that as such his claim cannot be refuted mostly because it cannot be comprehended either.

In any case, according to Westphal this proves that atemporal causation is logically and metaphysically possible – although since he presents no ontological status for it, its metaphysical feasibility must surely be questioned. He does grant that the stance he puts forth, including r-temporality, might eventually be shown to be erroneous.³¹ This concession seems partly rhetorical, however, since there seems to be no way of even beginning to falsify r-temporality as it stands. Furthermore, since Kant himself makes a sharp distinction between logical and metaphysical (real) possibility,³² Westphal's fault lies not merely in optimism but in disregarding one of Kant's important distinctions.

It is difficult to see what exactly Westphal is trying to prove. If we keep to the formal level, his noumenal causation is virtually indistinguishable from e.g. Allison's transcendental affection – with the difference that Westphal specifically holds on to the causal status of this affection. As far as I can see, his arguments do suffice for this, because they show that it is necessary in Kant's transcendental idealism to think of some kind of an analogy for causality as prevailing between the thing in itself and the cognition. He cannot be satisfied with this, however, if and when he wants to produce a genuinely metaphysical interpretation. For him noumenal causation must be expressly *causation*. This does not follow, however, for the simple reason that causation based on r-

²⁹ KTPR, 55.

³⁰ See Allison, Henry E.: *Kant's Transcendental Idealism, an Interpretation and Defense*, revised and enlarged edition. New Haven and London 2004, 131. See also Falkenstein, Lorne: "Kant's Argument for the Non-spatiotemporality of Things in Themselves". In: *Kant-Studien* 80, 1989, 265-83.

³¹ KTPR, 56.

³² This is most explicit in KrV, A 596n/B 624n.

temporality is as such precisely merely *analogous* to temporal or empirical causation. To counter this sort of argument expressed here, he remarks in a surprisingly haphazard manner that:

In this regard, one might urge that Kant ought to speak only of the thing in itself as “grounding,” but not as “causing,” sensory affection. This is a nicety Kant does and can overlook. [...] What matters more than the term is whether the term is used in a context in which determinate empirical judgments are possible. No such judgments are possible in the context of reflecting transcendently on the source or nature of sensory affection. So long as this basic point is kept in mind, either term can be used indifferently, just as Kant does.³³

I think this is extremely misleading. Insofar as causation has an empirical meaning, the term in question cannot be used in the same sense in contexts that are not about possible empirical judgments. It is very dangerous to create this sort of equivocation in which causation is understood differently in one situation than in another, especially since this difference in meaning can in fact be represented by distinguishing between causing and grounding. In other words, it should sooner be concluded either that Kant himself mixes up his concepts (which would definitely not be unheard of), or that the expression “causation” is used in twofold meaning in Kant’s philosophy (which would not be unprecedented either). Westphal’s claim that Kant overlooks the said “nicety” seems to be ungrounded as well: in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* Kant makes it explicit that in supersensible contexts the word “cause” (*Ursache*) signifies merely the “ground” (*Grund*).³⁴ “Causation” in empirical contexts has a different meaning than “causation” in non-empirical ones, and “using the term indifferently” cannot change this: noumenal causation remains merely analogous to empirical causation and my criticism holds.

The lack or weakness of arguments does not of course yet show that Westphal’s interpretation of noumenal causation is erroneous. Indeed, it can be admitted that noumenal causation *would be* proper causation *if* the division between transcendental and empirical that prevails in Kant’s philosophy could be eliminated, i.e., if it could be shown that the field of applicability of categories is not (*contra* “official” Kant) restricted to empirical reality after all. This seems to be exactly what Westphal purports to do as well, as is made evident by his later attempts to formulate on the basis of transcendental affinity such a neglected alternative that would in effect abolish this division.

Westphal aims to show that, in a sense, empirical causation is secondary to noumenal causation by demonstrating that transcendental idealism is a metaphysical theory, not a methodological commitment. However, his arguments seem so lacking and half-baked here that I suspect that even he does not believe them. In a very problematic passage he claims strikingly briefly that Kant’s transcendental idealism is metaphysical since on its basis the whole of spatiotemporal, empirically real world is mere appearance for us, and thus exists only in our representing it:

According to transcendental idealism, “causal relations” among “phenomenal objects” is commonsense shorthand for [...] representations of certain rule-like relations among manifest objects or events. From the transcendental level alone can we understand that causal relations in

³³ KTPR, 52.

³⁴ KU, AA 05: 195.

the empirical realm are not self-sufficient; they are nothing but relations constructable by us in our representing manifest objects and events. Kant's transcendental idealism is a baroque, decidedly metaphysical view.³⁵

I cannot see, however, how on these grounds the metaphysical nature of transcendental idealism has been shown. Sooner it would seem to have been dogmatically assumed. It is difficult to grasp how Westphal can bypass the whole debate on the methodological or metaphysical nature of transcendental idealism with such a haphazard claim – especially since he takes Allison to be his main adversary. According to Westphal, the fact that causal relations of empirical world are not self-sufficient in transcendental idealism apparently directly implies its metaphysical nature. However, such implication remains undemonstrated. Moreover, the fact that empirical causation is not “self-sufficient” does by no means imply that it is not proper causation at all: causation can well be “nothing but relations constructable by us” without thus being “secondary” in any sense. To claim otherwise would be to presuppose some higher order causality and in effect to beg the question against the methodological readings. Westphal also refers to Kant's manner of speaking of the empirical world as a *mere* world of appearances.³⁶ However, the idea of methodological readings is exactly that appearances are not to be interpreted as some sort of “second class objects” beyond which a kind of True World lies. Therefore there is little else to do but conclude that Westphal ends up merely *presupposing* the metaphysical interpretation, not in any way demonstrating it. Furthermore, since Westphal's reading leads Kant's transcendental idealism to a contradiction, one could consider this, if not yet a *reductio ad absurdum* of his reading, at least a good reason to doubt it.

Perhaps Westphal is implicitly claiming that since noumenal causation is primary, the causal relations of empirical world turn out to be secondary. But this would follow only if noumenal causation really were causation proper. Unfortunately he could not support this claim, for, as I remarked before, the grounds for *this* are equally insufficient since noumenal causation is merely *analogous* to empirical causation. If on the other hand it is not causation at all, we would end up with an Allisonian model in which the only proper causation lies in the causal relations of the empirical world, which is quite the contrary to Westphal's aim.

In any case, Westphal does admit that a move from permissibility of thought to objective reality is still to be made, that is, from the fact that we *can* think along these lines to that we *should* or even *must* do so. According to him, noumenal causation cannot be granted objective reality solely within Kant's theoretical philosophy, but it has to be based on his practical philosophy, as a postulate of practical reason.³⁷ This as such shows that Westphal does not intend his above argument from the supposed metaphysical nature of transcendental idealism as a serious or conclusive one. It is unfortunate that Westphal does not develop his intriguing idea much further, and indeed says that a “brief remark must suffice for now”³⁸. Given the extremely central role of the idea of noumenal causation as a practical postulate, his decision is a problematic one. Since he offers only more or less cursory remarks on the subject, it is not prudent to dwell on the matter further. Nonetheless, I have some reservations about applying a practical postulate to discussions about realism and idealism. Not only is the

³⁵ KTPR, 60f.

³⁶ KTPR, 60. Cf. KrV, A 190f/B 235f.

³⁷ KTPR, 61-66.

³⁸ KTPR, 62.

ontological status of the practical postulates problematic (as Westphal himself notes³⁹), the whole relationship between Kant's practical and theoretical philosophy is a source of much controversy.

Basically what we are left with is at best the *logical possibility* of noumenal causation. The reference to practical philosophy underscores this. Indeed, Westphal's next step is to attack transcendental idealism itself with the purpose of showing that it is insufficient. If he could show this along with the insufficiency of empiricism, the modal status of his neglected alternative would rise to necessary since it would not only be one possible way to account for the possibility of experience, but in fact the only one. The function of the reference to practical postulates is merely to show that this only surviving explanation Westphal offers is indeed tenable.

3. *Transcendental Affinity*

One of the central claims of Kant's transcendental deduction is that without a sufficient orderliness of the intuited world self-consciousness would not be possible.⁴⁰ Westphal aptly calls the lack of such order "transcendental chaos"⁴¹. Kant names the thesis that orderliness of intuition is a necessary condition for cognitive experience *transcendental affinity* (*transzendental Affinität*).⁴² The idea is that in order for us to organise our experiences in a sensible way in the first place, there must be something in the matter of experience that makes it possible to compare and connect them with one another. Kant defines it as follows: "The ground of the possibility of the association of the manifold, insofar as it lies in the object, is called the *affinity* of the manifold"⁴³. According to Westphal, transcendental affinity ultimately refutes transcendental idealism and opens up a way for his neglected alternative. I will not consider the actual neglected alternative in this paper, since my primary aim is to show that his arguments for it fail of their own accord.

3. 1. *Transcendental Affinity as a Formal and a Material Condition*

According to Westphal, transcendental affinity is a problem for Kant because it is a "nonsubjective, necessary condition for the possibility of self-conscious experience which is both material and formal, though neither intuitive nor conceptual"⁴⁴. By nonsubjectivity Westphal means that the said condition is not a condition set for the object by the subject, unlike categories or forms of sensibility. Instead, it is a property of the objects themselves, a property that is at the same time a necessary condition for self-conscious experience. This is not a problem for Kant's philosophy as such, since for instance the thing in itself that is both accepted and required by his philosophy is this kind of a condition. It becomes a problem only if it is *both* a formal *and* a material condition. A material condition concerns the given part of experience, whereas a formal condition concerns the part of experience we ourselves have set in it. It is important to realise that if a condition were both formal and

³⁹ KTPR, 61.

⁴⁰ KrV, A 90f./B 122f., B 129-31, B 134f.

⁴¹ KTPR, 93.

⁴² KrV, A 114.

⁴³ "Der Grund der Möglichkeit der Assoziation des Mannigfaltigen, so fern es im Objekte liegt, heißt die *Affinität* des Mannigfaltigen" (KrV, A 113).

⁴⁴ KTPR, 72.

material simultaneously, it would violate transcendental idealism's vital dichotomy between matter *given externally* and form *imposed by the subject*. In addition, if transcendental affinity is indeed such a condition, it can be neither sensible nor conceptual since for Kant the conditions of the sensibility and understanding concern only the form of experience.

Given its extremely central role, Westphal is surprisingly vague on what "formal condition" in fact means – he only gives arguments as to why a condition must be formal without properly explicating the features of such a condition. According to Kant appearances have both a matter and a form. The former corresponds roughly to *what* appears in the appearance and the latter to *how* it appears. On this account, a material condition of appearances would be something that is necessary for there to be a *what*-part, whereas a formal condition would be something that is necessary for there to be a *how*-part. Taken together, these constitute the conditions for there being appearances. It is important to realise that there *could be* a *what*-part without a *how*-part, and *vice versa*, even though in such a case there would be no appearances to experience. In short: a material condition must be a function of the matter of appearances, and a formal condition correspondingly a function of the form of appearances. Westphal explicitly grants the part concerning matter, so it seems appropriate to assume that he agrees on the formal, analogous side as well.⁴⁵

Westphal argues that if transcendental affinity is indeed both a formal and a material condition, Kant's philosophy would seem to be forced to either of these extremes: if this condition is subjective, Berkeleyan idealism follows, in which the cognition produces both (at least some of the) matter and form of experience;⁴⁶ on the other hand, if this condition is objective, realism⁴⁷ follows in which both matter and form of experience are given to us. Westphal himself opts for the latter, realistic stance: the function of the synthesis by the subject is only to *reconstruct* the order in nature, not to construct it.⁴⁸

The most crucial part of Westphal's argument is the claim that transcendental affinity is both a formal and a material condition for the possibility of experience. However, I submit that while he is correct in claiming that transcendental affinity is a material condition, he errs in that it is also a formal one.

According to Westphal the reasons for the alleged formality and materiality of transcendental affinity are as follows:

This condition is both "material," because it must be a function of the characteristics of the objects we experience (or, analogously, of the matter of our sensations), and yet it is also "formal," because it concerns the relations among the material (qualitative) characteristics of the objects we experience.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ KTPR, 87.

⁴⁶ However, *contra* Westphal, I think it is very problematic to refer to Berkeleyan idealism here, since Berkeley too affirms that experiences are not produced solely by the perceiving subject. God, as extraneous to the subject, is also required.

⁴⁷ Again I must object Westphal's use of realism. This is not empirical realism, but it might be transcendental realism. In any case, it is Westphal's unqualified realism.

⁴⁸ KTPR, 90, 112.

⁴⁹ KTPR, 87.

He also gives separate arguments for both its materiality and formality:

Granting that combination is a result of intellectual synthesis, whereby “combination” would designate the effected complex of elements (whether sensory or conceptual), *combinability* [i.e., affinity] must be a function of the elements thus combined.⁵⁰

Transcendental affinity of the sensory manifold is a “formal” condition for the possibility of experience, because it allows objects to be ordered.⁵¹

As a summary it can be said that according to him transcendental affinity is a formal condition because, first, (F1) it concerns relations, and second, (F2) it is a condition for ordering objects. It is a material condition because (M) it is a property of objects themselves. The latter I will accept as it stands, since Kant’s words leave little room for interpretation.⁵²

I submit that while (M) is correct, both (F1) and (F2) are flawed. This means that transcendental affinity is a material condition but not a formal one, just like Kant would have it. Consequently, it does not point to any incoherence in transcendental idealism.

3. 2. *Transcendental Affinity as a Condition for Ordering Objects*

(F2) fails, for the fact that something “allows objects to be ordered” (i.e., is a condition for their ordering, as it must be interpreted in this context) does not yet make it a formal condition. Otherwise the absurdity would follow that the thing in itself is also a form of experience, since without it there would be nothing to order and thus no ordering. Kant does say, however, that “that [...] which allows the manifold of appearance to be ordered in certain relations I call the *form* of appearance”⁵³. For this to make sense, he must mean by “allowing” that without a form the manifold of appearance cannot be ordered in certain relations, i.e., that this cannot be done *solely* on the basis of the matter of appearances. This is supported by the fact that Kant here contrasts form with matter. That is to say that on this account he can *not* mean that *anything* working as a condition for there being a manifold of appearance intuited as ordered in certain relations would constitute a form of appearance, but simply that without the form of experience the manifold could not be intuited.

In the Amphiboly Kant is very explicit that the matter “signifies the determinable in general” and the form “its determination”⁵⁴. Insofar as “determination” refers to an act of determining, i.e., of ordering into relations, form is either the ordering or the order itself distinguished from that which is ordered.⁵⁵ Thus it should be concluded

⁵⁰ KTPR, 89.

⁵¹ KTPR, 91.

⁵² E.g. KrV, A 113.

⁵³ “dasjenige [...], welches macht, daß das Mannigfaltige der Erscheinung in gewissen Verhältnissen geordnet werden kann, nenne ich die *Form* der Erscheinung” (KrV, B 34). (A-edition reads “geordnet, angeschauet wird” (KrV, A 20) instead of “geordnet werden kann”.)

⁵⁴ “bedeutet das Bestimmbare überhaupt” and “dessen Bestimmung” (KrV, A 266/B 322).

⁵⁵ The relationship between the terms “determining”, “ordering”, “associating” and “relating” may be unclear. Determining basically means individuating in the sense that if an object is fully determined, it is individuated as a particular object. Determination therefore requires determining the properties belonging to an object as well as its relationship with other objects.

that form is something that “allows objects to be ordered” only in a restricted sense: it is the complex of relations of the manifold of appearance. Since transcendental affinity is only a condition for there to be such a complex of relations, there is no basis for claiming that it would be a formal condition. In short: it is not a formal condition, but a condition *for* (applying) form.

The idea is that every appearance is a combination of matter and form. Since these two make appearances possible, they must be logically prior to appearances. In order for an appearance to manifest itself, its matter and form must be combined, i.e., a form must be applied to or imposed on the given matter. Transcendental affinity is a condition *for* this application of form, but it is not a *formal* condition, that is, a function of the form of appearances.

This is admittedly a tricky point, but I am confident that careful deliberation on this shows that my view is correct. Both my and Westphal's readings are compatible with what Kant says in the above-mentioned B 34 quote, but I think that Westphal's interpretation suffers from serious incoherence with regard to the rest of what Kant says about transcendental affinity, as well as about the distinction between matter and form of appearances. Since he also appears to use this (mis)reading of Kant against the rest of his philosophy, his strategy does not seem very charitable.

3. 3. *Transcendental Affinity and Relations*

The problem with (F1) also serves to underscore the analysis of the preceding section. That something “concerns relations” does not yet mean that it is a formal condition, because matter too fulfils this criterion by being that which is related in relations. The problem is that Westphal's use of the term “concern” is ambiguous. The form must actually “concern” relations in a very specific way: it must either *be* the relations between the matter of appearance or be the *act* of setting the matter into relations. In the Amphiboly Kant explicates via examples the correct usage of form:

In every judgment one can call the given concepts logical matter (for judgment), their relation (by means of the copula) the form of the judgment. In every being its components (*essentialia*) are the matter; the way in which they are connected in a thing, the essential form.⁵⁶

It seems that the correct reading of form with regard to relations is that the complex of the relations themselves constitute the form of appearance. Transcendental affinity is not on this account a formal condition, since it is merely a condition for the possibility of this complex of relations.

This is equal to determining the objects and properties associated with the given thing. Quite clearly relating also requires ordering: placing things into relations. While these terms thus have distinct meanings, their intimate connection allows for their quite free usage in this context. What is important is that all of these are functions of the form of experience and all are part of the determination of objects, i.e., of moulding the manifold of sensory affection into cognisable objects.

⁵⁶ “In jedem Urteile kann man die gegebenen Begriffe logische Materie (zum Urteile), das Verhältnis derselben (vermitteltst der Kopula) die Form des Urteils nennen. In jedem Wesen sind die Bestandstücke desselben (*essentialia*) die Materie; die Art, wie sie in einem Dinge verknüpft sind, die wesentliche Form.” (KrV, A 266/B 322.)

Even with the risk of being repetitious, the crux of my criticism is: Westphal conflates “formal condition” with “condition for form”. Associability of something is merely a condition for associating it, but not as such part of the (act of) associating itself. Analogically, that there is coffee in the pan is a material condition for the possibility of the act of pouring that coffee in a mug, but not part of the act of pouring itself. It is clear enough that the affinity or associability, as a property of an object, is *not* a function of the form of the object, but merely a *condition for giving* a form to it, i.e., for associating, relating or determining appearances with regard to one another, quite as the term “associability” suggests (since it is a property that allows for associating). It is also equally clear that this is (merely) a *material* condition in accordance with (M). I hope that the following explication suffices to convince even the most unconvinced reader.

It can be said that the ordered number pair (a, b) is set into the form of coordinate system in (analytic) geometry when we represent it as a point in a coordinate plane. In this kind of case the number pair itself is the matter, the information if you will, of a point in the coordinate plane, whereas the location of the point within the coordinate system (and its image specifically as a point) is its form. This location constitutes of the complex of relations the point has to every other (possible as well as actual) point in the coordinate plane. The principle of transcendental affinity says (only) that there must be something in the number pair (a, b) that *makes it possible* to represent it in e.g. the said coordinate system. As a property of the number pair it is a *material* condition. It is as such also a condition *for* giving a form to the number pair, i.e., for representing it in a coordinate plane – but not a *formal* condition, or a condition that would be set by the form (the coordinate system). Also, it is again worth emphasising that we can have a number pair (matter) without a coordinate system (form), and a coordinate system without a number pair, even though only their conjunction gives birth to a coordinate point (appearance).

This also allows for a clear explication as to why exactly Westphal's claim that the affinity concerns relations is flawed. For example, the number pairs (a, b) and (c, d) do not *as such* include a relation to each other. They are set into a relation *only when* they are set into the same form: for instance they might determine a straight line in xy-plane, or perhaps a pair of complex numbers. Precisely *this* is one of Kant's main philosophical points: the form is that *via which* sensations are *placed* in relations. Sensations then do not actually *have* any relation to each other as such since they are thought separately and given singularly – only their connection in the mind grants them a form and subsequently a relation to one another. This is the essence of Kant's principle of synthetic unity of apperception.⁵⁷ One does not even have to enter Kant's system to understand (if not ultimately agree on) the idea that relations among qualitative features are constructed by the cognition that compares them according to certain perceived similarity. Simply put: two red objects need not be in any sort of relation with one another just because they are red, but they do of course share the same common property that *allows for* them to be thus related. Again the same point emerges: transcendental affinity is merely a condition for form, and as such it is strictly material.

⁵⁷ Cf. especially KrV, B 129-31, B 136-39.

I wish to emphasise, however, that in a certain important sense I deem Westphal to be correct: there has to be something in the matter of sensations that can be called orderliness *even before* we place it there.⁵⁸ In a way the idea is that the matter must be accompanied by some sort of a “building plan”, on the basis of which the mind imposes a form on it (or organises it into a form) – in other case nothing would prevent total perceptual chaos. For example, even if we were to accept the thesis that we impose causality into the world ourselves, it still does not follow from this that the causal relations between things would themselves be any more arbitrary than decidable by us: we do not determine particular causes, i.e. what causes what, but only the form in which this connection is represented.

This was well understood by Kant who formulated the principle of transcendental affinity to prevent this sort of chaos. He can and indeed should admit the pre-cognitive regularity of things. He can minimise it however: since it is order beyond all of our cognitive capabilities, nothing substantial can be said of it. It is a necessary condition for experience that we must *think* that the thing in itself has some kind of incomprehensible (non-formal) regularity, of which nothing more can be said. This is essentially the same point I made earlier about the (merely) analogous nature of noumenal causation. Westphal claims that Kant can only prove the necessity of such transcendental affinity on subjective basis, but not *ground* it on these subjective foundations, that is, transcendental idealism cannot explain the *origin* of transcendental affinity.⁵⁹ This is absolutely correct, but Kant does not need to do that either. Faithful to his transcendental method, he argues merely that experience would not be possible without transcendental affinity, and since we nonetheless do experience, we must also postulate transcendental affinity. He does not need to explain *why* there is transcendental affinity, no more than he must explain why there are things in themselves – indeed no more than a physicist should have to be able to answer the question as to *why* there was a Big Bang.

I conclude that Westphal fails to undermine transcendental idealism via transcendental affinity, since transcendental idealism is quite compatible with it. As long as transcendental idealism holds, Westphal’s neglected alternative remains a mere possibility.

4. Analogies of Experience and the Metaphysical Causal Thesis

Westphal begins a second line of attack against transcendental idealism through Kant's *transcendental* and *metaphysical causal theses*. The former is the claim that “every event has a cause”⁶⁰ and the latter that “every physical event has an *external* cause”⁶¹. According to Westphal, the transcendental causal thesis requires the metaphysical one, which in turn depends on some metaphysical presuppositions. Since transcendental idealism is meant to provide a basis for metaphysics, and not *vice versa*, no metaphysical presuppositions whatsoever can inhere in its foundations.

⁵⁸ With reference to coordinates, it is instructive to note that the number pair (a, b) cannot be represented in a, say, three-dimensional coordinate system (x, y, z), at least not without additional information. In other words, there must be some kind of structural isomorphism here, just like Westphal (and e.g. Falkenstein as referred earlier) holds.

⁵⁹ KTPR, 114.

⁶⁰ KTPR, 134; cf. KrV, A176f./B 218, A 191/B 236, A 195/B 240.

⁶¹ KTPR, 143, emphasis mine; cf. MAN, AA 04: 543.

Structurally speaking, Westphal's argument divides into two parts. First he aims to demonstrate that the transcendental causal thesis introduced in the Analogies of Experience of the *Critique of Pure Reason* does indeed require the metaphysical causal thesis, which is in turn proved in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (*Foundations* for short). The second part purports to show that the arguments given in the *Foundations* are insufficient. Should this line of criticism succeed, it would undermine the transcendental causal thesis and consequently Kant's response to Hume. This in turn would, to Westphal's mind, severely weaken the plausibility of transcendental idealism – perhaps enough to justify its abandonment.⁶² Even though I have reservations about how detrimental this would be for transcendental idealism, I will not concern myself with the overall feasibility of Westphal's tactic here.⁶³

Westphal's critique advances as follows. First he remarks that all three Analogies form a "tightly integrated set of mutually supporting principles"⁶⁴ and that on this account the Third Analogy cannot be separated from the other two. Secondly, Westphal contends that the Third Analogy is based on metaphysical presuppositions.⁶⁵ Consequently all of the Analogies rely on the said presuppositions.⁶⁶ From this it would follow that the Analogies of Experience, while meant to be handled purely on a transcendental level, would in fact be ultimately based on metaphysical foundations. Hence Westphal submits that transcendental philosophy *presupposes* rather than *defines* metaphysics.⁶⁷

I grant Westphal the first step. Firstly, it is nowadays accepted widely that the Analogies are to be taken as a unit.⁶⁸ Secondly, Kant himself provides some support for this by speaking of the "general principle"⁶⁹ of the Analogies of Experience. The second step, however, calls for more scrutiny. Westphal's basic argument is that since the Third Analogy deals with physical objects in space, Kant should argue for the metaphysical causal thesis instead of the transcendental one⁷⁰. More precisely, the metaphysical causal thesis is required because Kant allegedly adheres to three metaphysical presuppositions in the Third Analogy: (MP1) external, transeunt

⁶² KTPR, 225f.

⁶³ It is quite indisputable that Kant laboured to show in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that Hume's scepticism about causality is misplaced. However, I am not convinced that failing in this would constitute the failure of transcendental idealism itself. One might well submit *both* that transcendental idealism is sound *and* that causality is not real. This would only mean that causality is not a category. In other words, causality would have the same status as for instance fate, the concept of which cannot, according to Kant, be justified *de jure* (KrV, A 84/B 117). Obviously this would wreak havoc within Kant's specific philosophical architectonic, but would not as such work against the possibility, or even the plausibility, of transcendental idealism as a general philosophical view.

⁶⁴ KTPR, 154.

⁶⁵ KTPR, 165f.

⁶⁶ KTPR, 133.

⁶⁷ KTPR, 170f.

⁶⁸ See e.g. Allison, Henry E.: *Kant's Transcendental Idealism, an Interpretation and Defense*, revised and enlarged edition. New Haven and London 2004, 229; and Guyer, Paul: *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*. Cambridge 1987, 168-275.

⁶⁹ "Der allgemeine Grundsatz derselben" (KrV, A 176). The B-edition reads "Their principle" / "Das Prinzip derselben" (B 218). However, due to both the ambiguity in expression and the disparity between the editions, I do not consider this textual evidence decisive as such.

⁷⁰ KTPR, 127-29.

causal interaction among distinct physical substances; (MP2) plurality of substances; and (MP3) lifelessness of matter.⁷¹ I will analyse each in turn to show that the Third Analogy in fact does not rest on these presuppositions.

In (MP1) the crux is that the causal interaction is between *physical* substances. Westphal summarises that the aim of the Third Analogy is to prove “the thesis that all physical events have external causes”⁷². However, Westphal errs (repeatedly) as to what conclusion Kant labours to draw in the Third Analogy. What is remarkable is that Kant does not even once mention the term “physical” in the whole of the Analogies, so it hardly seems *prima facie* justified to characterise the Third Analogy using that concept. Since “physical events” are very closely related to “material events” (i.e., events concerning matter) and matter is expressly considered in the *Foundations*, Westphal's argument borders on question begging. In fact, the Third Analogy can be summarised in Kant's following words: “Thus it is necessary for all substances in appearance, insofar as they are simultaneous, to stand in a thoroughgoing community of interaction with each other.”⁷³ While it is true that the substances Kant speaks of are supposed to be external to one another, there is no mention of physicality.⁷⁴

One might perhaps defend Westphal by insisting that external causes must be physical and material causes, but since the *Foundations* are meant to apply the transcendental principles of the Analogies to the empirical concept of matter, that would simply beg the question against Kant, since he distinguishes community between *substances* in space from community among (physical) *matter* in space. These are to be treated on different levels of abstraction: the first on a transcendental level in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the latter on an empirical level in the *Foundations*. The crucial difference is that the former analysis does not rest on any empirical concepts whereas the latter involves application of the empirical concept of matter. On this account there is no basis for claiming that in the Third Analogy Kant would be arguing for transeunt causal interaction among distinct *physical* substances.

Westphal defends (MP1) also by claiming that whatever Kant is trying to prove, his principle of community, as argued for in the Third Analogy, nonetheless requires the empirical concept of matter and thus “incorporate[s] a metaphysical content”⁷⁵ into the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Due to the density of Westphal's argumentation, I will quote him directly:

On the basis of the principles defended in the Analogies of Experience, distinguishing changes of state from coexisting states of affairs requires distinguishing nonspatial changes of states from changes of place [...]. However, changes of place can only be identified if one can identify bodies that change place, and one can only identify bodies that change place if one has a concept of bodies that can change place. This concept is (or at least includes) the concept of “the moveable in space,” and this concept is an empirical concept.⁷⁶

⁷¹ KTPR, 157, 161, respectively.

⁷² KTPR, 26; cf. also KTPR, 157.

⁷³ “Also ist es allen Substanzen in der Erscheinung, so fern sie zugleich sind, notwendig, in durchgängiger Gemeinschaft der Wechselwirkung unter einander zu stehen.” (KrV, A 213/B 260.)

⁷⁴ Kant uses the term ‘matter’ once (KrV, A 213/B 260), but only as an example when speaking about heavenly bodies and light. The term has no constitutive role in the proof offered in the Third Analogy. On externality, see e.g. KrV, B 258.

⁷⁵ KTPR, 159.

⁷⁶ KTPR, 159.

“The moveable in space” is Kant’s *empirical* characterisation of matter in the *Foundations*, and this is the crux of Westphal’s argument. However, the Third Analogy (and the Analogies in general) sets off with the fact that we *do* identify these things. Obviously, since I can function in the world, I am able to identify when bodies change place and when they alter their states. Kant’s argument runs from the fact that I can experience simultaneity to establishing that only thoroughgoing causal interaction among substances makes this possible. It may well be that *in addition* to this it can be proved, perhaps among Westphal’s lines, that I must *also* have the (empirical) concept of “the moveable in space”. Thus there is no reason to suppose that the Third Analogy *requires* the concept of matter, but instead it seems that in the *Foundations* Kant is simply extending the results of the Third Analogy to physical matter. This order is very important since the issue at stake is whether Kant’s metaphysics requires transcendental tenets or *vice versa*.

With regard to (MP2), Westphal claims that the Analogies do not entail substance pluralism, but merely presuppose it.⁷⁷ The reasoning behind this accusation is that in the Third Analogy Kant speaks of substances in plural as well as in singular, yet there is nothing in it to justify the plural form. As far as I can see, by substance pluralism Westphal can mean either the view that (SP1) there are different *kinds* of substances (such as material and spiritual), or that (SP2) the substances are of the same kind yet the substratum of each thing is a distinct substance.

Kant’s own definition of substance is a familiar one: it is “the substratum of everything real, i.e., everything that belongs to the existence of things”⁷⁸. Now, Kant’s usage of the terms “substances” and “things” side by side throughout the Analogies seems to imply that in this context he has in mind things stripped of their secondary qualities, i.e., the underlying *parts* or segments of an all-encompassing substance corresponding to given things (regardless of the secondary qualities they might have). The idea would be, then, that Kant is speaking about the parts of substance that individual things cut out of it, not of different kinds of substances. This would explain why he quite carelessly speaks of things and substances indiscriminately: when he says that substances A and B influence each other he must mean merely that the parts of substances corresponding to things A and B influence each other.⁷⁹ Therefore the claim that Kant would adhere to (SP1) is unfounded.

On the other hand, (SP2), in which the substances are quantitatively distinct, does not seem particularly problematic. It suffices for Kant and his causal interaction in the Analogies that separate parts of substances (things) are in a thoroughgoing interaction with one another. These parts may or may not be distinct substances, since the required interaction can equally well be between parts of one all-encompassing substance as between distinct substances. The crux of the matter is that Kant does not *need* any sort of presupposition of substance pluralism in the Third Analogy, regardless of what he says or even what he means. As far as I can see, the problem of the number of substances is chiefly semantic (especially since, if Kant had used merely the singular form, he could be charged of presupposing substance monism). Westphal seems to merely overemphasise Kant’s

⁷⁷ KTPR, 163f.

⁷⁸ “das Substrat alles Realen, d. i. zur Existenz der Dinge gehörigen” (KrV, A 181/B 225).

⁷⁹ See also Allison, Henry E.: *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, an Interpretation and Defense*, revised and enlarged edition. New Haven and London 2004, 246.

usage of the plural form; the alleged substance pluralism of the Analogies can easily be interpreted as a mere *façon de parler* without any damage to Kant's thesis. It is worth noting that Westphal too acknowledges that the principle in the Third Analogy can be accounted for even in a Spinozistic substance monism,⁸⁰ which implies that Westphal too agrees that Kant's thesis is quite compatible with substance monism. All in all, there seems to be no convincing reasons for accepting (MP2).

According to (MP3), Kant's Third Analogy rests on the lifelessness of matter. Westphal claims that this is because Kant fails to rule out *hylozoism*, i.e., the view espoused for instance by Leibniz that matter has internal determinations. The problem is that the Third Analogy simply does not need to rule it out either, since the conclusion argued for in it is: "it is necessary for all substances in appearance, insofar as they are simultaneous, to stand in a thoroughgoing community of interaction with each other"⁸¹. This is equal to claiming that there *is* external causality between things. Specifically Kant does *not* argue, nor does he need to, that there is *only* external causality. Indeed, Westphal's analysis of (MP3) seems to suffer from a kind of modal blunder: the Third Analogy shows that things must be in causal interaction with one another, but not that *every* change in them should be produced by some external influence – which is a stronger claim and is argued for only in the *Foundations*. Thus Westphal errs when he claims that the conclusion of the Third Analogy requires refutation of *hylozoism*. Instead the Third Analogy leaves, and can leave, the matter open.

Given that all three allegations of metaphysical presuppositions are unfounded, little remains of the force of the argument according to which Kant's Analogies are grounded on metaphysical examinations of the *Foundations*. Thus the second line of argumentation against the tenability of transcendental idealism is unconvincing. Consequently, Westphal's neglected alternative remains a mere, undemonstrated possibility.

5. Parting Words

Westphal's book is a detailed and impressive piece of work. He has done his research generally well and argues extensively and sharply for his theses. Unfortunately his acuity is selective and fails at several key points. In fact, at times he argues for some rather trivial point in exhausting detail whereas several extremely important claims, especially those regarding the metaphysical nature of Kant's transcendental idealism, are discussed hastily in mere few lines.

I have attempted to point out three crucial flaws in Westphal's overall thesis. First, Westphal's defence of noumenal causation remains lacking: he manages to show only its thinkability, which is something that Kant, too, readily admits. Since Kant's overall project in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is more or less to draw a boundary between what can be cognised and what only thought, this seems to bypass the whole general point he is trying to make. Second, instead of proving that transcendental affinity is both a formal and a material condition for the possibility of experience, Westphal ends up with showing it to be a material condition *for* (the possibility of) form – just like Kant would have it. Third, Westphal's attempt to show that the Analogies of

⁸⁰ KTPR, 161.

⁸¹ See note 72 above.

Experience rest on metaphysical presuppositions either fails or is severely lacking as he seems to misconstrue the claims and goals Kant has in the Analogies.

Westphal's book is nonetheless an intriguing and important opening in the normally somewhat classless debate concerning naturalism and transcendental philosophy. It is delighting indeed to see a philosopher with naturalistic tendencies to actually take seriously what Kant says and engage in a real debate with him. I also sympathise with his general tactic: transcendental affinity and the difficult borderline between form and matter to which it points is exactly where I too would drive the wedge. Furthermore, his analyses of Kant's semantics alone make his book worth the while, and for those interested in Kant's philosophy of nature it is an intriguing work indeed. It is my hope that the problems and shortcomings presented in this article would allow Westphal to further clarify and solidify his interesting position.