Revista de
Estudios
Kantianos

Revista de
Estudios
Kantianos

Revista de Estudios Kantianos

Publicación internacional de la Sociedad de Estudios Kantianos en Lengua Española
Internationale Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Kant-Studien in Spanischer Sprache
International Journal of the Society of Kantian Studies in the Spanish Language

Entidades colaboradoras
Sociedad de Estudios Kantianos en Lengua Española (SEKLE)
Departament de Filosofia de la Universitat de València
Instituto de Humanidades, Universidad Diego Portales

Índice

Recensiones

Eventos y normas para autores

Recensiones

Dennis Schulting: *Kant's Radical Subjectivism: Perspectives on the Transcendental Deduction*. Londres, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 460 pp. ISBN 978-3-319-43877-1.

TIM JANKOWIAK[1]

Kant's Radical Subjectivism presents a collection of essays shedding some fresh light on the *Critique of Pure Reason*'s notoriously obscure "Transcendental Deduction" of the categories. It is Schulting's second book on the Deduction in 5 years, and it gives him the opportunity to delve further into issues not already covered in the earlier volume (see Schulting 2012; the new volume does not, for the most part, presuppose familiarity with the first one). Some of the ground he covers includes: the nature of transcendental apperception (chapters 2-4); objectivity and objective validity (chapters 3-5); phenomenalism (chapter 4); non-conceptual content (chapters 5-6); synthesis (chapters 6-7 and 9); and Hegel's criticisms of Kant (chapter 8). Each chapter is rife with insightful analysis of important passages, and the book will be invaluable to anyone working on issues pertaining to the problems of the Deduction.

While the book's nine chapters can be read as standalone essays, they are unified around Schulting's 'radical subjectivist' interpretation. This is an interpretation both of what constitutes objective validity in a judgment, and also what it is to be an object. Regarding the former, the claim is that the *a priori*, subjective structures of cognition (most notably, the transcendental unity of apperception) determine what can be an object of experience. As he puts it, «the possibility of knowledge of objects essentially and wholly depends on subjective functions of thought or the capacity to judge, given sensory input, that is, on transcendental apperception» (2017: 10); «subjectivity […] is solely constitutive of the very conception of what an object is, or what objectivity *means*» (2017: 22). As stated, this could be taken simply as a profession of an internalist, representationalist reading of Kant's epistemology. However, what makes his subjectivism 'radical' is his account of the ontological status of objects. Subjectivity does not simply determine what can count as an object for me; it also determines what experienced objects 'are': «My judgment 'about' a certain object *x* coincides with *x*'s existence *as object of my experience* […] The unity of apperception constitutes what an object *is*» (2017: 122-123). Thus Schulting's radical subjectivism is simultaneously a phenomenalism (more on this below).

At about 450 pages, *Kant's Radical Subjectivism* is a long volume that covers a lot of ground in meticulous detail. As it would be impossible to survey all of its rich contents here, I will instead focus on two issues that I take to be at the core of Schulting's reading of the Deduction: first, his use of the radical subjectivism interpretation to complete the central inference of the Deduction; and second, his 'moderately conceptualist' account of intuition.

In many ways, Chapter 4 is the heart of the book, since it is here that we get the fullest elaboration and utilization of Schulting's 'radical subjectivism' and the phenomenalism that goes along with it. The central question of Chapter 4 considers the objection (from Stephenson, Gomes, and Van Cleve, among others) that there is a 'gap' in the argument of the Transcendental Deduction. Specifically, it has been argued that Kant is guilty of an equivocation between the claims that i) the

[1] Towson University. Contact: tjankowiak@towson.edu.

ISSN-e: 2445-0669
DOI 10.7203/REK.3.1.12266

categories are necessary for the experience of objects, and ii) that the categories are necessary for the objects of experience. For even if Kant is successful in demonstrating i), this yields only the claim that 'we' need to use the categories if we are to think of objects. It does not entail the claim in ii) that 'the objects themselves' must conform to the categories. As Van Cleve puts it, «there is an easy verbal slide from 'we must apply categories' to 'categories must apply'» (1999: 89 *ápud* Schulting 2017: 143). If the objection is on the mark, then the problem corrupts the Deduction at its core.

Schulting's defense of Kant's inference is complicated – among other things, it includes a noteworthy interpretation of the notion of objective validity – and I will not address all of it here. Rather, I will focus on the final sections of the chapter, where Schulting articulates his understanding of Kant's phenomenalism. The basic idea is that Kant has not accidentally conflated cognitive conditions on experience with ontological conditions on objects, but has rather intentionally identified them. Defending this identification requires bringing in the 'radical subjectivism' described above:

> the "subjective" conditions under which I apperceive representations as "all my representations" conjointly *are* thus at the same time the *objective* conditions of thought, namely the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be an object for me (2017: 168).

Now as stated, the above characterization might be embraced by any number of different commentators (including even some who would offer merely epistemological readings of transcendental idealism). What is distinctive about Schulting's reading is his phenomenalist account of what the objects of experience 'are'. It can be a bit difficult to pin down what exactly Schulting means by his phenomenalism. He claims to defend an 'analytical' form of phenomenalism, rather than an 'ontological' one. He borrows this distinction from Van Cleve, and while he takes inspiration from Van Cleve's own phenomenalist interpretation, he rejects Van Cleve's attribution of ontological phenomenalism to Kant. However, this is misleading because Schulting does not seem to understand 'analytical phenomenalism' in the same way as Van Cleve. For Van Cleve, analytical phenomenalism is the view «according to which truths purportedly about material things are necessarily equivalent to truths solely about our perceptions» (1999: 71). Van Cleve's analytical phenomenalism is thus a semantic thesis regarding the meaning of claims about material objects. This is not the view that Schulting defends. Rather, his view is that,

> the empirical object, that is, the object of appearance, only exists as *construction* out of representations, so exists only when and if it can be represented by a subject, in the realm of possible experience. […] Empirically real objects, that is, spatiotemporal bodies, are only actual in us, in perception (178).

This is not a mere semantic thesis, but rather a claim about the ontological status of objects. Nevertheless, Schulting's phenomenalism is still not ontological phenomenalism as it is usually construed, i.e., as the claim that empirical objects are identical to mental states (as, for instance, Berkeley would have it). Instead, Schulting states that the empirical object «is a projected or intentional object» (180). That is, empirical objects are not mental states, but rather the 'intentional objects' of those mental states. Thus, Schulting's phenomenalism does not quite fit either the 'analytical' nor the 'ontological' labels as they are usually understood.

Surprisingly, Schulting says little about how exactly his phenomenalist reading solves the central problem of the chapter (he instead concludes with some final criticisms of Van Cleve). Nevertheless, I think it is clear how his discussion of phenomenalism provides the materials for a

final response to the objection outlined above. One way to put that objection is in terms of the (supposedly) invalid inference from 'I must represent *x* as *F*' to 'necessarily *x* is *F*'. While such an inference would be invalid from the perspective of a traditional realism, it is not invalid from the perspective of the phenomenalism Schulting attributes to Kant. On this view, empirical objects are just intentional objects and nothing more. I.e., they are 'mere' intentional objects. Now all it can mean to say that a mere intentional object has a certain property is that the object is represented as having this property. And (to consider the modally stronger claim) all it can mean to say that a mere intentional object 'necessarily' has a certain property is that the subject is necessitated in representing the object as having that property. Thus Kant does not accidentally conflate subjective conditions on experience with ontological conditions on objects. Rather, on Schulting's reading, he intentionally identifies these two conditions by way of his phenomenalism.

I offer one final remark on Schulting's phenomenalism. While this reviewer is sympathetic to the interpretation, many others will not be. The standard critique against such readings is that they reduce Kant's idealism to a 'transcendentalized' Berkeleyan idealism. Schulting's rejection of traditional ontological phenomenalism puts some distance between Kant and Berkeley. However, this will not satisfy most anti-phenomenalist critics. For instance, while Allais will acknowledge that Schulting's brand of phenomenalism is more «sophisticated» (2015: 42) than traditional ontological phenomenalism, she will still group it under the rubric of interpretations that «mentalize appearances» (43), all of which she wants to reject. Given these popular objections from Allais and many others, it would have been good to hear more about how Schulting could respond to these concerns.

Turning now to another focal point of the book, Chapters 5-7 defend a 'moderately conceptualist' theory of Kantian mental content, and he puts this interpretation to work in explaining the Deduction's account of synthesis. Schulting contrasts his reading with the interpretations of both other conceptualists (especially McDowell) and non-conceptualists (especially Hanna and Allais). It is worth noting that moderate conceptualism might as well also be called a moderate *non*-conceptualism, since it «leaves room for non-conceptual mental content in some minimal sense» (Schulting 2017: 198). Here again his position can be difficult to pin down. On the one hand, he wants to argue that all intuitions that contribute to objectively valid cognition and reference to objects will necessarily be combined with the categories.

> Necessarily, *if* intuitions are to be seen as contributing to possible knowledge of objects, *then* intuitions are subsumed under the categories as the conceptual conditions under which knowledge of objects is possible (236).

This leaves room for the possibility of non-conceptual intuitions that are not subsumable under the categories and which won't enable reference to objects (see Schulting 2017: 197, 236). Thus the position seems to be that the majority of our intuitions are conceptual, even though some are not. Yet on the other hand, he also argues that «intuition as such is not necessarily or at least *not* yet categorically determined. […] Intuition is not in and of itself conceptual or even proto-conceptual» (239-240). Rather «it is the *relation* between intuition and concept which is conceptual» (239). Putting these two elements of his interpretation together, it might sound like Schulting is saying that (objectively referring) intuitions both are and are not necessarily conceptual. However, a more charitable reading would take him to mean that intuitions cannot perform their function of referring to objects except insofar as they are combined with concepts in actual judgments. Nevertheless, when the position is put this way, I worry that it turns the conceptualism debate into a mere verbal dispute. For the position is that intuitions i) are not in themselves conceptual, ii) are not even all conceptualizable, and iii) succeed in referring to objects only when combined with concepts in

judgment. This position 'could' be called a form of conceptualism, but I suspect that many self-proclaimed *non*-conceptualists would be happy to embrace all three claims as well. For I would have thought that the conceptualism debate was about the question whether intuitions 'in themselves' are conceptually structured (perhaps because they are formed by a conceptually guided process), not whether intuitions need to be combined with concepts in judgments in order to enable objectively valid reference to objects.

If I have any general criticism of the book, it would be that the length can sometimes be prohibitive. The nine chapters average about fifty pages of dense commentary each. While Schulting's engagement with the intricacies and delicacies of these interpretive debates is laudable, it can sometimes be difficult to make out the forest constituted by all the trees. And while Schulting brings in an impressive array of secondary literature in his discussions, sometimes fuller context for these discussions would have helped. At the very least, the ideal reader would be someone already familiar with the extensive literature on the Transcendental Deduction, as Schulting often takes such familiarity for granted. Nevertheless, Schulting offers persuasive defenses of his subjectivism, phenomenalism, conceptualism (not to mention his accounts of objective validity, figurative synthesis, and apperception, which I have not been able to go into here). The book deserves a place on the shelf of anyone seriously engaged with Kant's project in the first *Critique*.

References

ALLAIS, Lucy: *Manifest Reality: Kant's Idealism and his Realism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

SCHULTING, Dennis: *Kant's Deduction and Apperception: Explaining the Categories*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

VAN CLEVE, James: *Problems From Kant*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999.