

## **Kant's Account of the Rational Sources of Metaphysics in the Transcendental Dialectic of the Critique of Pure Reason**

RUDOLF MEER<sup>\*</sup>

Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Russia

**Review of: Willaschek, M., *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics. The Dialectic of Pure Reason*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 308. ISBN-13: 978-1108472630.**

The *Transcendental Dialectic* is an insufficiently studied section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This is surprising given that Division Two of the *Transcendental Logic* forms the largest part of Kant's first critique. If the doctrine is systematically considered, then Kant's critique of the *metaphysica specialis*—that is, rational psychology, rational cosmology, and rational theology—is at the core of the investigations (Willaschek 2018, p. 11). And in fact, the emphasis seems to be on the destruction of the unconditioned objects, God, world, and soul. In this sense, the *Transcendental Dialectic* would be a long Appendix to the *Transcendental Analytic* and the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, in which Kant dissociates himself once again from the metaphysical tradition and his philosophical opponents, in order to legitimize indirectly the previous analysis. Kant gives unambiguous hints for understanding the architectonic of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in this sense, by classifying the *Transcendental Analytic* as *Logic of Truth* and the *Transcendental Dialectic* as *Logic of Illusion*. Hence, Kant's early critics had determined that Kant neither has a positive dialectic theory nor a concept of system, and this is a point of view which is frequently repeated in subsequent writings.

A decline in interest in structural problems of the transcendental deduction of the concepts of understanding and the question concerning the completeness of the table of

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<sup>\*</sup> Senior Researcher at the Academia Kantiana, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University. Contact: [RMeer@kantiana.ru](mailto:RMeer@kantiana.ru) This research was supported by the Russian Academic Excellence Project at the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University.

judgements—problems that were at the core of the Kantian scholarship in the 70s, 80s, and even in the 90s—has led to a research situation in which the *other side* of the *Transcendental Dialectic* was reviewed in more detail. In this sense, Marcus Willaschek’s analysis forms part of a series of monographs which examine the complex structure of Kant’s two projects in the *Transcendental Dialectic* (Piché 1984; Neiman 1994; Grier 2001; Klimmek 2005; Pissis 2012; Anderson 2015; Kreines 2015, ch. 4; Bunte 2016, ch. 2; Meer 2018). Following this tendency, Willaschek formulates quite clearly the problem of his book: “I think it is time to pay more attention to this ‘other side’ of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, which consists in Kant’s extended and highly complex argument for the Rational Sources Account” (Willaschek 2018, p. 11).

Willaschek’s analyses are a new milestone in the slowly emerging research on the constructive function of the *Transcendental Dialectic* in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The author manages to indicate the controversial passages of the *Transcendental Dialectic* and highlights the argumentative problems of the Kantian text. He reconstructs the problems of the text and presents in an enormously well-read manner the already-considered argumentative strategies in order to propose a consistent and philosophically attractive interpretation of the *Transcendental Dialectic*. This makes Willaschek’s examination not merely an interpretation of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, but rather establishes the book as a standard work concerning its structure and function.

The book has two main parts, titled “From Reason to Metaphysics” and “The Other Side of the *Transcendental Dialectic*”. In the first part, Willaschek explores his understanding of the so-called *transition passage*, that is, Kant’s doctrine of the transition between the logical use of reason (*logical maxime*) and the real or transcendental use of reason (*supreme principle*). Part two shows how Kant applies this general template throughout the main text of the *Transcendental Dialectic*. In this sense, the heart of the book consists in questions about the transition passage (A 307–8/B 364). Starting from this, however, Willaschek develops a reading of the entire *Transcendental Dialectic*. In particular, the Appendix to the *Transcendental Dialectic* and the differentiations introduced therein play a crucial role in his interpretation. The prioritization of the Introduction and Book One of the *Transcendental Dialectic* sets the study apart from the already mentioned books concerning this topic.

Willaschek’s change of perspective in the framework of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, i.e., from the *Transcendental Analytic* to the *Transcendental Dialectic*, makes clear that Kantian concepts like *transcendental*, *metaphysical*, and *transcendental deduction* are not merely relevant for Division One of the *Transcendental Logic*. On the contrary, Kant argues in the *Transcendental Dialectic*, following the example of the metaphysical deduction of the concepts of understanding (A 321/B 377; A 329/B 386), for a derivation of the concepts of reason (Willaschek 2018, pp. 170–175), and attempts in several places (Willaschek 2018, pp. 128–135) a transcendental justification of the supreme principle of pure reason, as well as the regulative use of reason of the ideas (God, world, soul) and the

principles (homogeneity, specification, and continuity). Already this explicit choice of terms sharpens the ears and eyes of the interpreter of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, because they indicate in the Kantian philosophy a positive foundation of the critical system. Correspondingly, Willaschek shows that the *Logic of Illusion* is not merely a major hurdle that has to be overcome in order to reach Kant's standpoint of transcendental idealism. Rather, Kant makes in the *Transcendental Dialectic* "metaphysics as a natural predisposition" (B 22) to the subject of discussion, and thereby a natural tendency in human beings to ask metaphysical questions and to come up with answers to them. Such an interpretation of the *Transcendental Dialectic* attributes to this passage an immanent and highly relevant function, especially because Kant poses the question, 'how is *metaphysics as a natural predisposition* possible?', as the key problem in his examination. In this sense, Division Two of the *Transcendental Logic* is an exploration of "transcendental illusion" (Willaschek 2018, pp. 103, 126, 135–138, 147–150), that is, the illusion which is unavoidable for human reason and which has therefore a specific function in Kant's system of reason.

Based on these conditions, the *Transcendental Dialectic* contains Kant's extended argument of the *Rational Sources Account* which combines, following Willaschek, three claims: "(1) pure reason [...] raises metaphysical questions; (2) pure reason is driven by its own need or its nature to answer these questions, even if the answer may not be ultimately warranted [...]; and (3) the metaphysical questions [...] have their source in 'the nature of universal human reason' – that is, they arise from the very structure of rational thinking as such" (Willaschek 2018, p 3). Willaschek reconstructs the *Rational Source Account* on four levels which correspond to the four main parts of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, that is, the Introduction, Book One, Book Two, and the Appendix. In doing so, he develops several fundamental insights, the five most important of which will be mentioned hereinafter.

First, Kant's constructive side of the *Transcendental Dialectic* is neither an isolated nor an insignificant claim. This becomes clear if the composition of the *Transcendental Dialectic* is considered (Willaschek 2018, pp. 9–11). Following its structure, Book Two is embedded between Book One and the Introduction on the one hand, as well as the Appendix to the *Transcendental Dialectic* on the other. In these passages, Kant develops, based on the principle of reason considered in its logical as well as real use, his doctrine of the regulative use of reason. The author also draws immanent connections between the Introduction and the first part of the Appendix, as well as Book One and the second part of the Appendix.

Second, Willaschek reconstructs a twofold distinction. Based on the differentiation between the logical and real use of reason, Kant's distinction between regulative and constitutive already refers to the real use of reason. Thus, the unavoidable illusion is not created based on a confusion between the logical / subjective use of reason and the real / transcendental use of reason, but rather in the way that the real use of reason is interpreted

which means regulative or constitutive (Willaschek 2018, pp. 103–126). The illusion is unavoidable in its regulative status of the real use of reason.

Third, Kant accepts with the principle of reason a presupposition of the metaphysical tradition which he rejects otherwise (Willaschek 2018, pp. 51; 61–62). However, Kant transforms the status of this principle and its justification. Thus, the commonly accepted basis allows Kant to introduce in Book Two an immanent critique in the form of his skeptical method. If this is taken into account, it becomes apparent why the transition passage in the Second Part of the Introduction of the *Transcendental Dialectic* has such a crucial function for Kant’s line of argumentation. Following Willaschek’s analysis, Kant offers a reasonable theory for the transition between logical and transcendental use of reason.

Fourth, Kant gains in Book One the *titles of all* ideas of reason, or rather the *systematic order of transcendental ideas*, and derives from these three classes in Book Two nine modes, which are: substantiality, simplicity, personality, and spirituality in the case of the soul; the absolute completeness of composition, division, origin, and mutual dependence in the case of the world; and the idea of an *ens realissimum* in the case of God (Willaschek 2018, pp. 182–184). These are modes in which objects can be thought to be unconditioned. In this sense, Willaschek points out that Book Two stands in a systematic relationship to Book One.

Fifth, for his *Rational Source Account*, Kant does not need the doctrine of transcendental idealism (Willaschek 2018, pp. 243–245). In this regard, Willaschek is consciously going beyond the Kantian text to offer a theory of the derivation of ideas which is valid, even though the Kantian idealism is not accepted. In this sense, Willaschek’s understanding of the *Transcendental Dialectic* should also have relevance for current debates in Philosophy of Mind, and for philosophers standing in rationalistic traditions like Wolff and Leibniz. For both traditions, and even for a large part of Kantian scholars, transcendental idealism is an unacceptable standpoint.

Considered in their own right, all these aspects are not completely new insights into the *Transcendental Dialectic*, as Willaschek himself shows with references to the state of art<sup>1</sup>. However, Willaschek develops these aspects in a very detailed manner, and presents them in a novel systematic relationship. In this sense, “Kant on the sources of Metaphysics” is an innovative interpretation of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, and at the same time a milestone for the research on the constructive part of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, which will raise the level in this field. In particular, researchers will again have to ask the following question: is it indeed possible to reconstruct the positive parts of the *Transcendental Dialectic* without referring to Kant’s doctrine of transcendental idealism? Apart from this question, and considering Willaschek’s results, the development of Kant’s

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the important Italian research on this topic, especially from S. Marcucci (e. g. 1988) and L. Scaravelli (e. g. 1954), is not taken into account.

regulative use of reason must also be reevaluated. This task not merely concerns the pre-critical development of the key feature of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, but also Kant's changes in the 1780s and 1790s. All these diachronic research questions, and much more besides, find in Willaschek's book a highly complex and useful synchronic analysis of Kant's position from 1781/1786, which should be the starting point for these further examinations.

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