REARGUING TRANSCENDENTALLY: KANT AND THE DEBATE ON THE UNIQINESS OF CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES

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Abstract: In this paper I discuss one of the main topics of the debate on Transcendental Arguments that took place since the 1960s: the uniqueness of conceptual schemes; and I relate the conclusions to Kant's philosophy. Firstly, I discuss Körner's statement of the main points and terminology, followed by Schaper's justification of an internal examination of our conceptual scheme. Then, I examine Davidson's proposal to abandon the scheme-and-content dualism. Finally, I take into account some viewpoints of J. E. Malpas', whose approach to the debate led him to a comparison between Davidson's holism and Kant's dualism that I would like to challenge.

Keywords: Conceptual Scheme; Uniqueness; Davidson; Kant.

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The renewed interest in Kantian philosophy since the middle of the 20th century —a century manifestly hostile toward the notion of universal and necessary knowledge—, especially in English-speaking philosophy, has transformed the terminology and reformulated certain Kantian theses and perspectives. This revival has not only set aside concepts and viewpoints previously regarded as untenable, such as the notions of 'thing in itself' and 'transcendental idealism', but at the same time reconsidered those aspects of the critical philosophy that were still regarded as tenable.[1]

The debate has not focused exclusively on Kant –even though some of his more famous passages were taken as examples or paradigms— but on the perspectives that his proposals opened up for contemporary thinking. The form and validity of 'transcendental arguments' was in fact the focal point of the debate, since authors such as Strawson and Shoemaker, among others, made proposals that recall those of Kant.[2]

Even though the interest raised by this renewal of transcendentalism was strong, some of the new versions of these arguments evidenced fatal distortions of the Kantian philosophy that

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[1] D. Bell affirms that, according to a number of authors in Anglo-American philosophy, a transcendental argument should meet certain requirements such as avoiding verificationism, phenomenalism, and idealism (Bell 200, p. 191).

[2] See Strawson (1959, 1966) and Shoemaker (1963). Among the first authors that criticized transcendental arguments in the 1960s were Stroud (1968), Gram (1971); and Körner (1966, 1967). For a critical report of the debate, see Niquet (1991), especially the first part: "Transzendentale Argumente: Zur Diskussionsgeschichte" (pp. 20-87); the Introduction written by Cabrera in Cabrera (Ed.) (1999); the unpublished thesis by von Bilderling; a recent compilation by Stern that renews the discussion (2003) and a book by the same author (2004).

led to an inadequate treatment of some themes. The current skepticism toward any kind of transcendental project raises the question whether this general disbelief is not a product of misunderstanding or a misguided formulation of that project rather than the outcome of an intrinsic impossibility.

This question is certainly very complex and cannot be answered briefly or conclusively. In this essay, I will focus on one of the main topics of the debate: the uniqueness of conceptual schemes. Firstly, I will discuss Körner's statement of the main points and terminology, followed by Schaper's objections, made in a Kantian spirit. I will then examine Davidson's proposal to abandon the scheme-and-content dualism, showing the consequences of this abandonment for transcendental reflection. In the examination of this debate, I am indebted to J. E. Malpas's perspectives. His approach to the debate led him to a comparison between Davidson and Kant, some of whose conclusions I would like to challenge.[3] Finally, I will put forward my own conclusions about Kant's position in relation to the problem of the uniqueness of conceptual schemes.

I

Since the 1960s, S. Körner (1966, 1967) has developed a criticism of transcendental arguments stimulated by the above-mentioned renewal of Kantian ideas in contemporary philosophy. He points out that this new tendency tries to restate the Kantian Transcendental Deduction and argues that this attempt is in itself impossible.

Kant did not consider that a uniqueness proof for the schema he had established through a 'metaphysical deduction' (which shows concepts *a priori*) was necessary, and attempted instead a 'transcendental deduction', which consisted in showing that the concepts already established (the set of categories, whose uniqueness was beyond discussion) can be applied to objects. As Körner remarks, he did not propose a uniqueness proof for his schema because the mathematics and natural sciences of his time (and also his own moral code) were beyond doubt (KÖRNER, 1967, pp. 323-324).

Nowadays, any defense of a transcendental deduction must take heed of Kant's mistake; it can no longer assume the validity of Newton's physics or any current scientific theory, given the contemporary awareness of the change of paradigms or scientific concepts. This is the reason

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[3] Niquet follows a similar argument to Malpas's and mine, analyzing Körner, Schaper, and Davidson, and then testing the results of the debate on transcendental arguments against Kant's own philosophy. However, this author approaches many other sides of the problem, so that his comprehensive view exceeds the limits of this essay. He deals with the authors here discussed in op. cit. 61-73.

why any new attempt to develop a transcendental deduction –whose aim, since Kant, is defined as the legitimation of the *apriori* use of certain concepts— requires a demonstration of the uniqueness of the conceptual schema that these concepts make up. As Malpas points out, the question of uniqueness is now inextricably bound to the question of legitimation (MALPAS, 1990).

For Körner, the Transcendental Deduction *is*, or *should* be, a uniqueness proof. However, he does not use the Kantian terminology nor analyze any contemporary example of transcendental argumentation (as is the case of Stroud's criticism of transcendental arguments, aimed at Strawson and other authors). Instead, he offers a reconstruction of a transcendental deduction using a conventional terminology, and he proceeds to enumerate its inescapable flaws.

His starting point is the idea that experience is divided into well-defined regions such as the external, the aesthetic or the moral, and that conceptual thinking makes a differentiation between objects and attributes of a different kind in each of these regions. This leads to the notion of a 'method of differentiation', characterized by the objects and attributes that it generates, in combination with an associated logic and certain transformation rules (KÖRNER, 1966, p. 551).

In principle, there can be a variety of methods of differentiation, which can generate attributes of a different kind in each empirical region. Of particular interest are the 'constitutive' and the 'individuating' attributes, since they make a definition of a 'categorial schema' possible.[4] Every object in the region has both kinds of attributes: the constitutive ones because they define what is to be an object in a region, and the individuating ones because they make distinctions between objects possible (KÖRNER, 1966: 551-552). If a given method of differentiation originates at least one attribute of these two kinds, it is said that this method amounts to a 'categorial schema'. In this case, it can be said that the method of differentiation belongs to the schema, but it can also be claimed, following Malpas, that the schema is an embodiment of the method of differentiation generating the attributes (MALPAS, p. 233n). As an example, Körner cites the Kantian method of differentiation that generates the constitutive concept of substance and the individuating concepts of time and Euclidian space.

Körner defines a transcendental deduction of a categorial schema as the statement of the reasons why *every* method of differentiation belongs to the schema. In other words, it is an attempt to prove that, in a given region of experience, every possible way of generating constitutive and individuating attributes can be reduced to the ways that the examined schema in fact uses. More closely seen, a transcendental deduction follows two steps. The first step is to

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[4] Körner uses the word 'schema' instead of 'scheme'. Later on in this essay (from section II to the end) I will prefer the latter, more commonly used in the debate.

establish the schema, an attainable task that has been carried out with success –in his opinion—by Socrates and Kant, among other philosophers. The aim is to show that the examined method/s of differentiation belong to a given schema. The second step consists in demonstrating the uniqueness of the schema, for which it must be shown that every actual or possible method of differentiation belongs to it. This amounts to saying that the examined schema is also *necessarily* used in differentiating a region of experience. Körner claims that this second step is unattainable and that transcendental deductions are thus impossible (KÖRNER, 1966, pp. 552-553).[5]

To validate his conclusion, Körner examines the three methods that allegedly amount to the only possible way in which uniqueness can be proven (KÖRNER, 1967, pp. 320f). In the first place, a comparison could be carried out between the examined categorial schema and undifferentiated experience. The problem is that any statement used to make such a comparison supposes a prior differentiation of experience. In consequence, undifferentiated experience is simply not available for the uniqueness proof. Moreover, this method cannot prove that the examined schema is the only one that can reflect experience.

In the second place, a comparison between schemas already established could be attempted. The problem in this case is that the comparison must grant from the start that the examined schema is not unique. In the third place, the schema could be examined from within, using its own statements; the trouble is that this procedure can show at best how a given schema works, not whether it is the only possible schema.

As a result, none of these three methods can demonstrate the uniqueness of a certain categorial schema, since none of them can do away with every other possible alternative to the examined schema; this precludes any transcendental deduction.

II

Schaper discusses some central issues stated by Körner and developed a defense of transcendental argumentation. Her strategy consists in a careful examination of the only three methods that, as we have seen, a uniqueness proof can follow (SCHAPER, 1972 a, pp. 105-108). The first method (a comparison of the scheme with undifferentiated experience) is for her unsustainable for the same reasons put forward by Körner, for whom the establishment of the scheme is a prior condition of a uniqueness proof. Consequently, an established scheme must have a method of differentiation that renders access to pure experience incoherent.

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[5] I. Cabrera correctly points out that uniqueness implies necessity. Actually, if there is no condition other than C that makes experience possible, and experience *is* possible, then C must be necessary. See: Cabrera 1999,16-17.

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The second procedure (a comparison between schemes) is for Schaper problematic if one frames it as Körner does: he takes away the initial uncertainty inherent in any comparison when he points out that a comparison between schemes assumes that the examined scheme is not unique, therefore concluding that this method is contradictory. Schaper counters that one could conceive *hypothetical* alternative schemes that need a proper inspection to establish their authenticity.

However, according Körner's notion of deduction, it can be noted –as Malpas indicates— that Schaper disregards the distinction between establishing a scheme and proving its uniqueness. In the context of this two-step procedure, one has to establish the schemes first, and in so doing it becomes obvious that they are not unique. Interesting to note here is that, although Körner rejects the possibility of proving uniqueness, he considers a non-uniqueness proof possible (MALPAS, p. 235).

In spite of this, Schaper does not follow the strategy of comparing particular schemes.[6] She believes that such a strategy, even if it were not contradictory, could not prove the uniqueness of a given scheme, for what is at stake is not the rejection of a given set of schemes but of *every* possible alternative scheme. Since the scrutiny of every alternative happens to be an unfeasible task indeed, the second method results as incapable as the first one to prove uniqueness. Schaper's own proposal consists in an examination of the conceivable bounds that set the limits of a valid scheme. She refers to a higher level of abstraction from where to evaluate schemes and affirms that any alternative scheme must violate some necessary presupposition of experience (SCHAPER, 1972 b, p. 489). The close examination of these presuppositions could tell us whether the schemes under consideration are spurious or authentic, depending on whether they include them or not.

Nevertheless, as Malpas suggests, this assumes that one has some criterion of 'schemehood'; but the question is, from where such a criterion can be taken. Since we think that the examined scheme is unique, it seems natural that we draw this criterion from it. In this case, however, we assume from the start the uniqueness that should be the result of the enquiry. Then again, if we try to get it from any other scheme, we assume the non-uniqueness of the examined scheme even before the demonstration is started (MALPAS, p. 237). Schaper admits that this implies a restoration of Körner's objections against the second method. If we actually knew the conditions of possibility that permit a comparison between schemes, then we would also know

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[6] Rorty (1971) thinks that a comparison between particular schemes is the only sound way in which a transcendental argument can operate. He denies that a transcendental argument can refute every other possible alternative, but he claims that it can be proven that a given scheme is 'parasitic' on another particular scheme. It must be noted that Rorty's proposal cannot prove uniqueness in the sense put forward by Körner, which requires the elimination of all other possible alternatives.

whether any examined scheme is or not unique; then it becomes clear that this method has no coherence at all. Schaper concludes by saying that this method remains coherent only if it takes for granted that the examined scheme assumes the authentic conditions of possibility (SCHAPER, 1972 a, pp. 107-108).

At this point, Malpas expresses the need to have a clear idea of what a conceptual scheme is. For this purpose he refers to Kant, taking into account that Körner himself acknowledges that he is concerned with a specifically Kantian issue. Contrary to Körner's belief, a scheme cannot be identified with a scientific theory. Although Kant considered that the physics of his time was an indisputable science, and took the conditions of possibility of that science for the conditions of experience in general, his transcendental deduction of a conceptual scheme is not identifiable with the Newtonian theory but with the set of conditions that make it possible (MALPAS, pp. 238-239).

Schaper is then right when she claims that Körner misrepresents the nature of a transcendental deduction and consequently does not focus on the problem of the necessary, and therefore unique, conditions that make experience possible. Then again, this last query is no other than the third method proposed by Körner (the internal examination of the scheme); in fact, Schaper argues that the rejection of this method is incoherent. As has already been noted, if one accepts that a given scheme meets the requirements of schemehood, then the task of conceiving alternatives makes no sense, not even the question of the uniqueness of this scheme. Any possibility must be conceived under the conditions imposed by that scheme, so that the task of its internal examination is perfectly legitimate (SCHAPER, 1972 a, pp. 108-112). This procedure allows an indirect comparison between schemes, since it permits to show the internal incoherence of a spurious 'applicant' scheme that does not satisfy the criteria of schemehood.[7] The important point is that these criteria are internal, since any intelligible scheme must adopt certain presuppositions that distinguish an authentic from a spurious scheme.

To explain with more detail what she means exactly by such presuppositions, Schaper gives an analogy. As in a successful translation the original and the translated version share some 'general principles of significance', the different schemes must reproduce in their own way those features common to every alternative. If a particular scheme were incompatible with those general principles of significance, then it would not be intelligible, and thus it would not be an alternative. Schaper comes to the conclusion that either the alternatives are variations within some common pattern of necessary features of experience, a pattern explored by transcendental

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[7] Schaper gives the example of the "Refutation of Idealism", where Kant tries to show that idealism must presuppose in the denial what it rejects, namely, the truth of the objectivity thesis, and so it can be regarded as internally incoherent. See Ibid, 110f.

deductions, or they are not intelligible at all. Körner's mistake was to propose finding a method to decide between different schemes instead of exploring the restrictions of what can be considered as an alternative scheme (loc. cit.).

III

As we mentioned above, Körner criticized the internal examination because it was able only to show that a scheme in fact works, but it could not show that the scheme is the only one that performs its function properly. It is this impossibility of getting out of the used scheme, to place us in a neutral point of view from where to weigh up schemes, that renders any uniqueness proof circular. Taking note of this, Schaper underscores the incoherence in Körner's rejection of the internal exploration of the scheme. The latter affirms that it is not possible to think outside the used scheme, but he pretends that the question about the existence of alternatives *makes* sense, i. e., he tries to think from a standpoint outside the schemes. Summing up Schaper's position, Malpas says that this impossibility of conceiving alternatives leads her to a rejection of a *non-uniqueness* proof, but she leaves room for a uniqueness proof with which to determine if the examined scheme fulfills certain prerequisites of intelligibility. Bringing these requirements of schemehood to light amounts for her to a valid uniqueness proof. Pondering her conclusion, Malpas grants that the third method is the most promising to demonstrate uniqueness (and also agrees with her that Kant employed this method), but he criticizes her for changing the subject under discussion to no avail. The focus is no longer on the uniqueness of schemes but on their relationship with certain general principles. The question of uniqueness, however, arises again in connection with these principles, with the subsequent risk of an indefinite regress in the proof (MALPAS, pp. 240-242).

The internal examination, conceived as Schaper does, leads also to an indirect proof, according to which if one can show incoherence within the scheme (as it happens, according to her, with the Kantian Refutation of Idealism), then the examined scheme can be rejected while its opposite is regarded as valid. But it can also be the case that *both* the investigated scheme and its opposite were invalid because both assume a set of false preconditions. In this case, the invalidity of a scheme does not imply the validity of its opposite, and the incoherence of one does not prove the uniqueness of the other. What are truly at stake here are the criteria or principles upon which the uniqueness proof is based.

Although Schaper moves forward from the problem of comparing schemes to the more basic question regarding the prior intelligibility needed to make such a comparison (more

exactly, to the relationship between the schemes and that fundamental level), this change of focus is not free of objections. In fact, one can only reach this basic level (from which the criterion of schemehood is obtained) through the internal examination of the scheme in use. In so doing, as Malpas points out, one makes the same mistake of *petitio principii* characteristic of the second method. The conditions of experience are already embodied, and therefore assumed, in the scheme whose uniqueness is under investigation (MALPAS, pp. 239-240). Thus, the scheme examined to determine its uniqueness is at the same time the source from where to obtain the schemehood criterion that helps to explore uniqueness.

We can now sum up the state of the affair following Malpas once again. For him, a dilemma concerning the uniqueness proof comes into sight. The proof of non-uniqueness results in a paradox, since it requires that the alternatives are intelligible, and -as we have seen- that is not possible. On the other hand, the demonstration of uniqueness ends in circularity in the proof, caused by the impossibility of getting out of the used scheme. In both cases what is at issue in the inquiry must be assumed, namely, the uniqueness or non-uniqueness of the scheme (MALPAS, p. 243).

In spite of this, one can see that Schaper's position entails a progress in the debate, since she does no longer deal with schemes as if they were theoretical interchangeable pieces from which one could keep at a distance to weigh up their possible utilization, as was the case with Körner. One should remember that the subject matter under discussion is not a scientific hypothesis but the conditions of possibility of experience. Accordingly, the idea that any uniqueness (or non-uniqueness) proof must assume what it investigates, expresses the fact that these conditions, whatever they are, are at the same time conditions of the research. Therefore, it is not possible to think outside them, neither to prove them nor to reject them, and not even to propose alternatives. Taking into account the 'bounds of sense' (to use Strawson's expression) within which the research necessarily takes place, seems a more appropriate way to explore these transcendental conditions than any abstract reflection, made from a neutral and external point of view, on the methods used to evaluate arbitrarily interchangeable schemes.

The transcendental project could then be defined as a research into those principles that all schemes must share. It must be stressed that a constraint exists in this new level, since a proof of uniqueness (as the ones proposed by Körner) cannot be attempted here without the risk of falling into the abovementioned impossibilities and, in the end, without the risk of circularity or regress in the proof. The key question is whether this constraint does not affect irreparably the validity of a transcendental reflection. If it is not possible to prove uniqueness without assuming uniqueness, then the whole transcendental enterprise seems condemned to circularity, or at least to a regress that puts off both the circularity and, at the same time, the looked for demonstration.

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But transcendental argumentation is also threatened by more basic considerations concerning the notion of a conceptual scheme. As we will see, Davidson's account of the impossibility of conceiving alternative schemes results directly in the abolition of the scheme-and-content dualism, and thus, it seems, of the transcendental enterprise altogether.

IV

In his well-known article on the notion of conceptual scheme, Davidson argues in a similar way to Schaper but arrives at opposite conclusions (DAVIDSON, 1984, pp. 183-198). He also focuses on the logical possibility of alternative conceptual schemes as a necessary condition to prove the uniqueness or multiplicity of schemes. In his research on the limits of the conceptual relativism, Davidson (unlike Körner) does not start with a clear-cut definition of 'categorial schema', but with the consideration of a widespread notion in current philosophy. According to a pervasive viewpoint that Davidson intends to criticize, the schemes are ways of organizing experience, systems of categories that shape the matter of sensation or points of view from where to look at events. According to this dualism, there can be no translation between different schemes, since reality would be relative to a scheme, unique or not, and there are, or there could be, alternative schemes, any one of which would state what counts as real.

Like Schaper, who spoke about 'general principles of significance' that allow a translation between schemes, Davidson links up the possession of a scheme with the possession of a language. Given the basic character of schemes and the less basic character of languages, different schemes cannot share the same language without losing their distinctiveness, although it is possible that a variety of languages belong to the same scheme. Thus, for Davidson if schemes are different, so are languages, and the identity of schemes can be determined with the help of the criterion of translatability. The strategy consists in exploring the failures in translation, especially the possibility and meaning of a total failure, for it would indicate that the examined schemes are truly different.

To examine such failures, it can first be noted that the dualism of scheme and content requires the consideration of the possible relations between the schemes and reality or experience. From a neutral standpoint outside schemes (analogous to Körner's first method to prove uniqueness), one could decide whether they are translatable or not. But Davidson rejects the metaphors used to make such a comparison. In the first place, the notion of 'organizing' reality or experience (or similar ones) is problematic for two reasons: first, because organizing a single entity makes no sense, and second, because the idea of organizing a plurality requires the

capacity of individuating entities according to *known* principles; in consequence, the scheme is not untranslatable.

The notion of 'fitting' experience or reality (or similar notions), on the other hand, cannot be distinguished from the mere concept of being true, so that a valid scheme is simply a true scheme. The criterion to identify alternative schemes becomes at this point 'true but not translatable'. The problem is that, as Davidson shows citing Tarski's explanation of the use of the concept of truth, one cannot understand one notion without the other, that is to say, one cannot separate the concept of truth from the idea of translating what is true to a language that we understand. Hence, instead of finding a neutral point of view from where to compare schemes, all we can have to identify different schemes is the requirement that an alternative scheme must be true, and this implies that it must be translatable into a known language. Davidson agrees with Körner and Schaper with the idea that it does not make sense to appeal to an uninterpreted reality to verify if a given scheme fits this reality properly. If a scheme fits this reality, it is because it is true, but then again if it is true, it is because it is translatable into our scheme, and consequently we cannot speak of a different scheme.

To support his rejection of the idea of untranslatable schemes, Davidson introduces a theory of interpretation according to which the speakers must assume that the beliefs they are interpreting agree with their own beliefs (DAVIDSON, pp. 188 ff). This implies for him that the beliefs to be interpreted must be seen as true beliefs. In line with this holist conception, true beliefs make up a general framework within which interpretation is possible, and outside which it cannot even start (it could not, for instance, lean on any neutral non linguistic reality). The presupposition concerning the truth of the beliefs to be interpreted is thus a principle or a condition of interpretation, which he calls 'charity'.

This view of interpretation implies that the idea of scheme relativism makes no sense. Given the way interpretation functions, it is not possible to identify an untranslatable scheme, and consequently it is not possible to compare schemes (the second of Körner's methods). Davidson's theses agree here with those of Schaper's, for whom the comparison between schemes must assume what is to be demonstrated, namely, that the examined schemes qualify as schemes from the point of view of certain principles shared by all authentic schemes. As we have seen, the uniqueness proof consists for her in an internal examination that shows the relationship between a given scheme and those principles (the third of Körner's methods).

Unlike Schaper, however, Davidson finds it impossible to make any sense of the idea of a conceptual scheme at all. The holism at the core of his outlook, as Malpas points out, inextricably relates the beliefs with the world, so that "our beliefs *about* the world can only be identified and interpreted through their connection *with* the world". As the notion of a conceptual

scheme amounts to a set of beliefs considered independently of the world, it cannot be made intelligible (MALPAS, p. 245).

To go over the positions already outlined: whereas for Körner it is not possible to prove the uniqueness of a categorial scheme, but it is possible to *establish* it, and for Schaper it is also possible to make an internal examination of it, Davidson directly rejects the scheme-and-content dualism and, with it, the notion of a conceptual scheme. As he puts it, "(…) if we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly say that they are one" (DAVIDSON, p. 198). In short, the notion of an untranslatable scheme must be rejected. It is no more than a dualist dogma of no use to understand the familiar notion of truth.

This conclusion fits Schaper's rejection of a non-uniqueness demonstration and also Malpas' considerations about the impossibility of a uniqueness proof (still attempted by Schaper). The grounds for both *aporias* are accepted by the three of them: it is not possible to conceive genuine alternative schemes, so that both proofs become unfeasible (despite Schaper's hopes). Davidson's contribution to this discussion amounts to a complete rejection of the scheme-and-content dualism.

V

Davidson's proposal to "reestablish unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false" (loc. cit.) goes hand in hand with the denial of transcendental research altogether, since the transcendental enterprise seems to presuppose a dualism of a conceptual scheme and a given content. Against this view, Davidson thinks that the world we know and the language we use must not be bothered with artificial problems, as Bubner puts it.[8]

Anyway, it is paradoxical that Davidson's own arguments have a transcendental character. In effect, he brings to light the methodology of interpretation that underlies communication, that is to say, the conditions of possibility of interpretation and thus of communication. Furthermore, his defense of a 'charity principle' assumes the form of indirect proof characteristic of transcendental arguments. According to this principle, if we did not presuppose the global truth of the beliefs we interpret, interpretation would not be possible.[9] If

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[8] For Bubner, Davidson puts forward a pragmatic solution to the problem of truth. See Bubner 1982: 318-319.

[9] Malpas distinguishes this version of transcendental argument from the one put forward by Rorty. Davidson does not reject particular schemes but the very notion of scheme, so that his standpoint is more basic (Malpas, p. 247). This is the reason why Rorty is right in his assertion that Davidson's position undercuts all transcendental arguments. See Rorty (1979).

we reject transcendental reflection with Davidson, then we must conclude that his own arguments, which include the set of beliefs underlying interpretation (beliefs that make up a conceptual scheme!), are useless. In other words, if he is right in rejecting all dualism of scheme and content (a feature of transcendental philosophy), then his own thesis should be abandoned.

This is the proper place to ask whether transcendental reflection *must* necessarily assume the form of the dualism criticized above, or whether it can develop in a way that agrees with Davidson's position. In fact, the methodology of interpretation that he elucidates can be regarded not as a conceptual scheme but as a set of conditions of possibility; it is uncertain whether the notion of a conceptual scheme amounts to the notion of conditions of possibility. One promising way of looking over this issue is to make a comparison between Davidson and Kant. Malpas suggests that a comparison between the two thinkers is relevant since the dualism of scheme and content seems necessary to put forward the question of transcendental deduction, whose aim is to justify the applicability of certain concepts to experience.

According to Malpas, both Davidson and Kant are concerned with the unity of knowledge, but whereas the former starts with a holistic view of interpretation and then tries to elicit the elements that play a role in this whole, the latter assumes from the start the separation of knowledge or experience into a subjective and an objective side (something that Davidson would consider meaningless) and then tries to show the unity of both sides of knowledge. In this way, both display a transcendental argument that seeks to prove the unity of knowledge or of interpretation, but they disagree on their initial assumptions. Malpas even sees a philosophical connection in the idea of the 'transcendental' as a notion that refers to the unity that is the basis for knowledge (MALPAS, pp. 248-249; ANGELELLI, 1972, pp. 117-122).

He thinks that the problem of Schematism (which can also be seen as the problem of the Transcendental Deduction and of the *Critique* as a whole) is similar to the one Davidson deals with; it can be framed as the question of the relationship between a conceptual scheme and the empirical content. Although Kant thought that experience was a unitary structure, with the unity of apperception as its highest point, he also considered that experience was the product of two elements, sensibility and understanding, and faced the problem of getting the two together. The resultant tension between the unitary and the dualist conceptions caused, for Malpas, the unresolvable problem of how to apply concepts to intuitions. Schematism tries in vain to solve it, acknowledging the basic heterogeneity of both elements from the start. For Davidson, on the contrary, there is no such problem since his holism of interpretation rejects the dualism of scheme and content (MALPAS, pp. 249-251).

In a word, a lesson can be learned from this Davidsonian conclusion. If Körner's and Schaper's attempts to prove non-uniqueness or uniqueness were found to be flawed or

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incoherent, traditional epistemology should be blamed, for having assumed a dichotomy between knowing subject and known object. The incoherence was there from the start; it can only be overcome by relinquishing a dualism that renders any explanation of knowledge impossible, with the risk, we can add, of abandoning also transcendental philosophy altogether (as Davidson in a paradoxical way does).

VI

The key question in Malpas' comparison between Kant and Davidson is his reading of the *Critique* as embodying the kind of scheme-and-content dualism that Davidson criticizes, a dualism that characterizes traditional epistemology. I will try to show that this attribution is not right and that the Davidsonian holism is not necessarily opposed to the Kantian transcendental reflection. The difference is that Davison stops, as it were, where Kant starts his research.

I do not intend to evaluate the difficulties found by Kant in trying to unite scheme and content; my aim is to determine up to what point in Kantian philosophy scheme and content (to use the debate terminology) are disconnected and separable elements from the start, as Malpas suggests. For that purpose I will start analyzing the applicability to Kant of one of the most common metaphors used, according to Davidson, by the censored dualism, -namely, the notion of 'organizing' experience or reality-, because it is the one closer to the Kantian proposal.

At the beginning of the Introduction of the *Critique* (2nd edition), Kant states that all our knowledge begins with experience in the order of time. Once our faculty of knowledge awakens into action, it becomes independent and works up the raw material of the sensible impressions.[10] This chronological explanation can be found throughout the *Critique*. In accordance with this division between a raw material and certain faculties that organize them, Kant proposes his well-known separation of two faculties of empirical knowledge, sensibility (characterized by its receptivity to raw material), and understanding (characterized by its spontaneity in organizing the material). The impressions of the senses supply (through sensibility) the first stimulus to open out the whole active faculty of knowledge and thus create experience. Kant says that experience contains two dissimilar elements, a matter from the senses and a form of ordering this matter, obtained from the intuition and the understanding that, on occasion of the impressions, are brought into action, eventually yielding concepts.[11] Kant admits that objects may appear

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[10] B 1. For citing purposes, I have consulted the English translation by N. Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan 1929).

[11] A 86 = B 118. Note that, from the viewpoint of experience, sensibility seems closer to the scheme than to the content.

without being related to the functions of understanding, since intuition is independent of understanding. This originates the problem that Transcendental Deduction tries to solve, i. e., how subjective conditions of thought can have objective validity (A 89-91 = B 122-123).

One can see, along with this reconstruction that supports Malpas' interpretation, that there exists something like a formal scheme; this formal scheme consists of the forms of sensibility (that receive the raw material) and the categories of understanding (that react to raw material), both giving rise to experience or, more properly, to empirical knowledge. Here arises naturally the question of the uniqueness of any concrete scheme able to perform this task, since the raw material could be organized in many different ways. In fact, Kant explicitly affirms that the manifold to be intuited must be prior to the synthesis of understanding and independent of it, and that the understanding merely combines the material (B 145). In short, Kant would put forward a dualism such as the one that Davidson criticizes. Not only would he make a clear distinction of two separate elements of experience, he would also propose a correlated pair of faculties as the starting point of his transcendental reflection.

I would like to argue now that this view of Kant, which goes along with the terms of the contemporary debate, is not an acceptable account of his transcendental perspective, which cannot be characterized simply as the research on a scheme that organizes a formless material. To show how disputable this view is, I propose to examine briefly the Kantian notion of object, which is ambiguous in an important respect. One can find textual support to define 'object' as something that stands under the categories (A 96 / B 161), but it can also be defined as something that may appear to us regardless of the categories (A 91 / B 123). The second conception, for O. Leaman, would emphasize the fact that experience involves intuition, thus mitigating the idealist flavor that the thesis of the necessity of conceptualizing experience entails (LEAMAN, 1977, pp. 469-470).

In spite of this noticeable ambiguity, it is clear that Kant's efforts are directed toward a definition of object in the first sense.[12] The categories are not *only* a scheme that is applied to a material to give it a certain form, but something more fundamental, namely, a *condition* of experience. Thus, there can be neither object nor experience without the categories, not even a 'disorganized' or formless experience. Kant's Deduction does not attempt to demonstrate a factual or necessary organization of a content operated by a scheme; it rather connects a series of categories *not with an actual experience or material but with possible experience*.[13] Ii is doubtful

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[12] For Leaman, actually, the 'weak' definition of object is parasitic upon the 'strong' one (as something under the categories), that is to say, the former makes no sense if it is not related to the latter: See Leaman 1977, p. 471 and passim.

[13] As Raggio indicates, the notion of possibility is for Kant stronger than those of reality or actuality, since it is a way of making reference to the only real categories. See Raggio 1973: 342.

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whether organizing a mere possibility makes sense at all. At any rate, although it can be said that the categories (and the forms of sensibility) sketch a scheme that applies to raw material, the reason is not that they are fortuitously able to perform that function, but that without them experience would not be possible at all. The concept of possible experience is in fact the only thing that bestows sense and meaning to the categories.

In short, if the categories can be seen as a scheme, it is only because before being considered as such, they must be seen as conditions of experience. Kant's Deduction analyses the conditions *apriori* of experience, and in so doing tries to demonstrate that it is only through the categories that an object can be thought (A 93-97 / B 125-126). Without the presupposition of the categories, nothing can be an object of experience; and their objective validity does not consist in a proof of their applicability to experience, but in a proof that they make experience (that is, the objects of experience) possible. Their only ground of proof is the concept of possible experience.

At the same time, the notion of a scheme does not entirely capture the idea of synthesis that underlies the categories. A 'scheme' suggests in fact something static that produces an effect on matter merely in virtue of its form. Conversely, empirical knowledge is for Kant an *active* performance of understanding. The idea of synthesis lies actually at the heart of the idea of category. To know an object is to produce the synthetic unity of the manifold of intuition (A 105 / B 137). Analysis itself presupposes the active and fundamental combination of the manifold. The key question is that *the notion of unity precedes apriori every concept of combination* and is not a category itself, since the categories presuppose a combination. This way, we must seek for this combination in a higher place in the unity of apperception, which contains the grounds of unity of the concepts in the judgments, and thus the grounds of possibility of understanding itself (B 130-131).

The notion of a static scheme that shapes a previously given matter, then, does not articulate the Kantian idea of an active and spontaneous synthesis *apriori* that constitutes experience. This synthesis, moreover, is not a product but a starting point before which there is no experience whatsoever. The categories are less a scheme than rules of synthesis, so there can be no object independent of them.[14] The notion of the categories presupposes the idea of *constitutive synthesis apriori*, that is to say, the idea of unity, *and not of a metaphysical dualism of scheme and content*. Thinking that there is no experience without that synthesis and no scheme without content and the other way round, Kant comes in fact close to Davidson. He

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[14] It can be objected that at least the forms of sensibility constitute in fact a scheme, but, then again, they are as incapable as the categories to produce empirical knowledge by themselves. On the other hand, although the categories do not play a role in intuition, the problem regarding their role in perception is a matter of discussion (see Wenzel 2005).

clearly expresses this relationship in the famous passage that relates concepts to intuitions: "Gedanken ohne Inhalt sind leer, Anschauungen ohne Begriffe sind blind" (A 51 / B 75). But even that sentence is not strong enough to reject the possibility of separating concepts and intuitions in the field of experience. The grounds for this necessary relationship can be expressed with another well-known passage, where Kant asserts that the conditions of the possibility of experience in general are likewise conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience (A 111). If the (sufficient and necessary) conditions are the same for the scheme and for the content, then these two cannot be separated. Once these conditions are given, both faces of the dualism come into sight.

To use a metaphor, experience is a tale that can only be told once it has presented itself as a whole. Starting from this indissoluble unity, only "a long practice of attention" (*lange Übung*) will allow us to distinguish the two elements that come united in experience, namely, the 'given' and what is supplied by our faculties (B 1 / A 260 = B 316). It is the 'transcendental reflection' that allows us to conceive what is united as separate. In this way, Malpas is wrong in thinking that Kant was concerned about uniting what he started viewing as separated. To apprehend the functions of certain faculties does not mean to assume that they can operate, in the field of empirical knowledge, disconnected from their respective objects. Unity, as in Davidson, is assumed from the start.[15]

However, a new dualism seems to come into sight. To solve it, Kant has to face the fundamental heterogeneity of concepts and intuitions. Schematism tries to show that, in spite of this heterogeneity, the categories can be applied to appearances by means of a 'transcendental schema' homogeneous with both things (A 137-147 = B 176-193). But if the interpretation that I have attempted is tight, this problem is not, as Malpas thinks, the main concern of the *Critique*, which focuses instead on the unitary structure of experience to determine its conditions of possibility.

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[15] Some questions arise here: Why then divide what is so united? Why not just state that appearances are the only ground for appearances? Or why not remain, with Davidson, in the mere pre-transcendental observation of the 'antics' of familiar objects? The answer, as I see it, must be looked for in the Kantian acknowledgement of the human finite nature. Although empirical knowledge is an indissoluble whole, we can guess that we are not the creators of that whole, that there is something that lies beyond our possible intervention. At the same time, since we are inevitably involved in that whole, it is clear that we must have an active role in its configuration. These assumptions lead naturally to a scheme-and-content distinction with no metaphysical flavor. So thinks Raggio, for whom matter and form in Kant do not have a constitutive or metaphysical meaning, but merely a reflexive one in the context of a criticism of knowledge (See Raggio 1973, p. 343).

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VII

The debate on the uniqueness of conceptual schemes leads us to the conclusion that talking about conceptual schemes is not an adequate starting point for a transcendental research. As it usually happens in philosophy, the terms and methods with which the problem is approached misled the debate, which should have focused earlier on the questions explored by Kant himself. The way in which Körner construed the project of a transcendental deduction in the context of contemporary thinking gave new life to an old problem, but at the same time put out of sight the true nature of such a deduction. Schaper noticed this and tried to correct the approach to the problems, but perspectives like that of Davidson's veiled the transcendental question even more (at the expense of self contradiction, since he also made use of a transcendental argument).

As we have stated above, experience is possible for Kant only by means of a constitutive synthesis given from the start, so that there is no scheme organizing content. Paradoxically, this consideration takes us back to Körner, who defined a scheme as a set of constitutive and individuating attributes. In this respect, given that a scheme *constitutes* the objects of a given region of experience, his perspective remains faithful to the Kantian spirit.

But Körner does not grasp the true nature of transcendental philosophy when he focuses on the notion of scheme and identifies transcendental deduction with a uniqueness proof of schemes. The idea of a scheme leads naturally to the conception of a plurality of schemes and to the examination, from a distance, of the uniqueness of a scheme. More precisely, he proposes and then rejects the three methods that, according to him, are the only possible ways to prove uniqueness. The first and second methods assume clearly that it is possible to keep oneself at a distance from the examined schemes in order to make a comparison between them or to compare them with undifferentiated experience. The analysis has shown, however, that proving uniqueness from *outside* the examined scheme is not a feasible task. Consequently, to put it in Malpas' words, a *non-uniqueness* proof is not possible.

Apparently, only the third of Körner's methods remained: internal examination. Schaper argued that Körner's rejection of this method results in incoherence, since it assumes that it is possible to think outside the scheme that supposedly embodies the conditions of experience. The development of the third method takes her to a higher level of abstraction, namely, the consideration of the general criteria of schemehood, which determine that a given scheme is in fact a genuine alternative scheme. The discussion of the three methods has shown that every uniqueness proof must necessarily be carried out at this level.

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As Malpas sums up, whereas for Körner uniqueness cannot be proved, for Schaper it is a non-uniqueness demonstration that is incoherent. In a Kantian spirit, she focuses again on the conditions of possibility of schemes themselves by means of an internal examination of the used scheme. Unfortunately, the (internal) comparison of the scheme with the conditions of schemehood (that is, the conditions of experience) faces a general objection put forward by Davidson.

Davidson presents a similar argument to hers but ends up with a rejection of the scheme-and-content dualism. Associating scheme with language like Schaper, he introduces a holist conception of interpretation, according to which every alternative scheme should be intelligible, and then he proceeds to show that as long as the scheme is intelligible it no longer represents an alternative. This way, non-uniqueness cannot be demonstrated. However, unlike Schaper, he rejects the idea that internal examination can help to prove uniqueness: if it cannot be said that the schemes are different, it cannot be said either that they are one. The notion of scheme makes no sense whatsoever.

To put it in the terms set out by Körner, the analysis of the third method (once the other two have been discarded) leads Davidson to the conclusion that the dualism of scheme and content must be rejected. The question arises whether this dualism can actually be applied to the Kantian reflection. Malpas gives it an affirmative answer, and puts forward an interpretation according to which Kant made an initial dualist distinction between concepts and intuitions, and thus failed in trying to explain how both poles are related to each other, whereas Davidson's holistic theory of interpretation rejects a similar dualism from the start.

I have cast a doubt on Malpas' point of view, stressing that the Davidsonian metaphors depicting this dualism cannot be applied to Kant, for whom the conditions of possibility of experience neither fit nor organize experience (two tasks characteristic of schemes). They rather *constitute* experience, a metaphor that Davidson does not take into account. This constitution is not a chronological process but a condition of possibility of experience. Experience is for Kant a unity of elements that can only be separated in an 'analytical' way that is at the same time 'transcendental', since it does not consist in dissecting mere concepts. The Kantian reflection allows to distinguish the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* aspects of experience, and also to conceive an explanation of knowledge in terms of scheme and content. Against Malpas' interpretation, Kant would agree with Davidson in rejecting the dualism of scheme and content from the beginning. But that does not mean that the research on the conditions of possibility of experience makes no sense at all. If I am right, Kant is as holist as Davidson, but he avoids paradox since his transcendental reflection is independent of such a dualism.

These considerations change the perspective on the question of uniqueness. Unlike the idea of scheme, the notion of conditions of possibility implies that of uniqueness. As we have seen, for Schaper the internal examination of the used scheme leads to an inquiry concerning the relationship between the scheme and the conditions that all schemes must share, in Kant's words, the possible experience. Hence, every uniqueness demonstration must assume these conditions, and therefore is not able to demonstrate them. The circularity of this procedure can be seen not as a flaw in the proof, as Malpas thought, but as a 'logical' necessity of transcendental research. The reason for this circularity is that a transcendental deduction cannot be detached from the object it examines, namely, the conditions of possibility of experience, so it must relate the schemes and the proof of uniqueness to the notion of possible experience. In other words, the research is carried out directly at the highest level of abstraction, where there is no distance from the conditions of possibility of experience, and therefore it is not possible to examine them from the outside. It is an examination of what is necessarily presupposed, so that the question of uniqueness can and must be approached by means of an internal examination of the scheme that supposedly embodies the authentic conditions of experience.

For Kant, this inquiry takes shape of a research on the relationship between a set of categories and the concept of possible experience. This way, Kant admits that the faculty of understanding can think of objects that are in themselves possible but cannot appear in experience. When related to the notion of possible experience, their empirical impossibility comes into sight (A 95-96). We can say that this procedure proves their non-uniqueness (or their uniqueness). If this is right, then Körner is wrong in thinking that Kant did not have in mind a uniqueness proof. This proof would explore the relationship between the 'scheme' and possible experience, and if these two were adequately articulated, they would express the most general and basic concept of *object*.

It must be noted, however, that to allude to 'uniqueness' in the context of Kant's philosophy is arguable, at least in the sense given to this concept in contemporary debate. Kant affirms that at a certain level of transcendental reflection, something like a uniqueness demonstration is not feasible. This way, it is not possible to explain why we have these and not other functions of judgment, or why space and time are the only forms of our sensible intuition (B 145-146). These considerations agree with our conclusion about the contemporary debate, where it has become clear that there is no successful method to demonstrate uniqueness. The proposal of an internal examination, the only one that resisted criticism up to a certain point, was in fact a way of focusing, again, on the conditions of possibility of experience.

Ironically, this last consideration does not seem to strengthen the argument in favor of arguing transcendentally. The possibility of asking whether some conditions of possibility

actually articulated are in fact the *authentic* conditions of experience remains open. After all, as Stroud puts it, "some of the things Kant thought could be shown must be true of any world anyone could make sense of have turned out not even to be true of this world" (STROUD, 2003, p. 163). Transcendental research cannot conclusively legitimate itself, since it runs the risk of reaching its conclusions too easily or too quickly, encouraged by the lack of a method that could correct it.

Furthermore, the main lesson laid bare by the contemporary debate is perhaps that the question of uniqueness arises again at a level *where no method of proving uniqueness is possible,* since no method can be detached from the conditions of possibility of experience. Accordingly, there is no point outside transcendental reflection to weigh it up and draw conclusions in favor of or against it.

For Kant, any transcendental approach must yield universal and necessary conclusions. His own attempt to elucidate the conditions of experience based its certitude on the modern science of his time. Today, it is no longer possible to accept the Newtonian paradigm; moreover, the very notion of a definitive science is no longer available. But I think that this does not imply that the transcendental project should be abandoned. The lack of scientific guidelines or a specific method to prove uniqueness does not mean that there are no conditions of possibility of experience at all.

In fact, contemporary philosophy keeps on arguing transcendentally in different fields of discussion, accepting at the same time the fallibility of knowledge. Thus, we can be cautious about our certitude of having found genuine transcendental conditions while at the same time we continue the internal quest and the 'transcendental discussion' about the conditions that underlie every possible conceptual scheme.
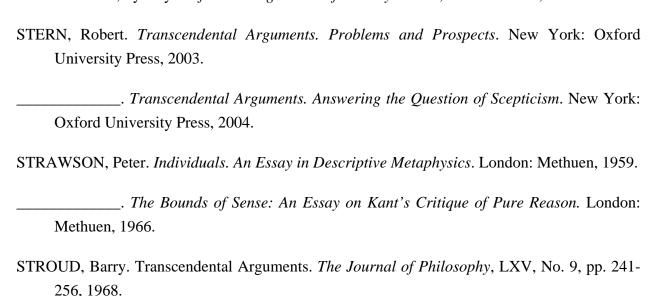
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