

EMPIRICAL REALISM WITHOUT TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM

COMMENT ON KENNETH R. WESTPHAL

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Abstract: In dialogue with Kenneth R. Westphal's position on realism and skepticism I defend an empirical realism which in a positive (though not positivistic) perspective rejects the transcendental components of Kant's empirical realism. The central ideas of the empirical realism I support are the characterizations of reality and truth as regulative ideals and of knowledge as unifying activity. I justify my conception by a conceptual and pragmatic analysis of the main relevant epistemological notions.

Key Words: Realism, Truth, Relativized A priori, Knowledge, Anti-foundationalism

First and foremost I would like heartily to thank Professor Cinzia Ferrini who had the idea for this meeting and organized it. I am also extremely grateful to Professor Kenneth R. Westphal both for his very generous words about my work and the opportunity that provided me to discuss an epistemological view that I feel is particularly close to mine and from which I learned considerably. Finally, I thank them both for the useful suggestions they offered for the improvement of my text.

1. I share Professor Westphal's opinion that we still have a strong theoretical, and not just historical, need to deepen the exploration of Kantian philosophy (Westphal 2004a, 268) and I think that Professor Westphal himself significantly contributed to this kind of research. His works, and in particular his 2004 book, *Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism*, shed a new light on numerous aspects of Kant's thought, making a contribution that has already deeply marked the interpretation of texts. At the same time, his way of looking at the «Copernican revolution», along with his book *Hegel's Epistemological Realism* (1989), has been one of the most powerful stimuluses to expose some debatable aspects of today's

approach to the practice of analytic philosophy and brought a breath of fresh air to the debate about realism. The complex of essays contained in the recent volume he edited, *Realism, Science, and Pragmatism* – the occasion for our meeting – is clear proof of what I just said. In this paper I would like to concentrate on the first issue of the three mentioned in the title of this volume – Realism – and attempt a dialogue with Professor Westphal, whose position I found very helpful to study.

My aim is twofold: first, I will try to show how our perspectives converge on some qualifying theses. Secondly, I want to point out those aspects in which they are in some ways different, starting from the attitude they assume towards Kant – who held that empirical realism and transcendental idealism walk hand in hand. Professor Westphal thinks not only that he himself can maintain a realist position regarding «our empirical knowledge of molar objects and events in space and time» (Westphal 2004a, 3; 2006), but also that he can defend this position via a transcendental proof analogous to the transcendental proof with which Kant intended to confute Descartes' «problematic» idealism and Berkeley's «dogmatic» idealism (Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 244, B274). For this reason Professor Westphal's realism aims to be a realism *sans phrase* (in other words, devoid of any further specification) (Westphal 2004a: 3, 5; 2006: 787 n. 18) with a transcendental proof. I, instead, maintain the idea of a relativized a priori, and thus refuse a strong (Kantian) conception of synthetic a priori judgments and distrust the notion of «transcendental»¹. Nev

¹ Let me bring to mind here the exact (and weighty) words used by Kant to introduce this notion: «I entitle *transcendental* all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible *a priori*» (1781¹–1787²/1985: 59, A11f.=B25f.), where the term *a priori* has to be intended as *absolutely* and not relatively a priori: «In what follows [...] – Kant says – we shall understand by *a priori* knowledge, not knowledge independent of this or that experience, but knowledge absolutely independent of all experience» (1781¹–1787²/1985: 43, B2f.). My position is based on the negation of synthetic *a priori* judgments as they are intended by Kant, a negation that I think I have formulated in such a way that it becomes reflexively self-consistent (see below note 2). I admit a relativized *a priori* of an analytic kind and a relativized synthetic *a priori* of a theoretical and constitutive nature as it had been partially seen by Reichenbach in his 1920 book on relativity and a priori knowledge (see Parrini 1976, II/6;

ertheless, I think I can provide some arguments to support a kind of empirical realism capable of taking into account some still valid aspects of Kant's thought and giving a new voice to what I called the guiding ideals of the *esprit positif*: anti-metaphysical objectivism, moderate epistemic relativism and rationalism (Parrini 1995/1998). These are the very same ideals that Logical Empiricists had tried to revive, joining the linguistic turn of philosophy – now in many ways a bygone trend – and using tools that later proved to be inadequate, such as the verification theory of meaning, the linguistic theory of the *a priori* and the substitution of epistemology by the logical analysis of scientific language (a substitution attempted mainly by Carnap, which Professor Westphal rightly criticized [2015e: § 6.1]).

So, my empirical realism seeks to be an empirical realism without transcendental idealism and without Kantian synthetic *a priori* judgments². Similarly to Professor Westphal's realism *sans phrase*, my real

2002b, ch. 7; 2003). Later also Michael Friedman (1999; 2001) recovered the relativized *a priori*, but only in the linguistic-analytic sense prevailing in Logical Empiricism (even in Reichenbach after the 1920 book and the 1921–22 essay on the discussion on Relativity Theory) and brought to its maximum development by Carnap with his conception of linguistic frameworks. Also the recent volume by David J. Stump (2015) does not take into consideration that double aspect of the relativized *a priori* in spite of the proper accentuation it places on the constitutive aspect, in other words on that aspect which Reichenbach (1920 and 1921–22) originally underlined to distinguish his position from Schlick's (see Parrini 2002b, ch. 7). Today Professor Westphal shows how it is not possible to conceive the relativized *a priori* as exclusively linguistic and even (*contra* Robert B. Brandom) not merely as metalinguistic (2016c). For Westphal this bears implications on van Fraassen's constructive empiricism too (2016d).

² Like Logical Empiricists I qualify my conception as empiricist rightly because it does not recognize the existence of synthetic *a priori* principles in Kant's sense (see, for example, Parrini 2003). Referring to the classification discussed by Professor Westphal in his book *Hegel's Epistemological Realism* (1989, 48–50), I would say that my empiricism is neither a Concept empiricism, nor a Verification empiricism, nor a Meaning empiricism; but I would also say that it is neither a Judgment empiricism if with this kind of position we mean the dogmatic statement that «All judgments are either analytic and *a priori* or else synthetic and *a posteriori*; there are no synthetic *a priori* judgments» (Westphal 1989: 48). If intended in this sense, in fact, my empiricism could not satisfy what according to Hegel is «an important desideratum for any theory of knowledge: any account claimed to be an account of human knowledge must be able to be known in accordance with its own principles» (Westphal 1989,

ism is argued via an epistemic reflection, but in my case this epistemic reflection is kept distinct from Kant's transcendental reflection because it cannot put forward the «coercive» claims of a transcendental proof³. Actually, I am convinced that both the different kinds of realism and the different types of anti-realism have good arguments on their sides, so that to disentangle the controversy among them requires considering the possibility of reworking some crucial concepts such as «truth» and «reality» (a *Bearbeitung* in the Herbartian sense [Herbart 1813¹–1937⁴/1964, in particular: §§ 1, 4, 6, 7]), and that conclusive decision on which position to assume depends upon considerations of global plausibility. This also makes unavoidable specifying the relevant conceptions with some *phrase*. The very nature of the divergences among these conceptions demands specifying whether what we want to criticize, rebut or accept and defend is a metaphysical realism, a common sense realism, an empirical realism, a semantic realism, a direct realism, a scientific realism, an epistemological realism and so forth, including the possibility of combining more than one option. It is not by chance that qualifications such as these appear in many titles of the essays collected in *Realism, Science,*

49). This is because «the judgment that all judgments are either analytic and *a priori* or else synthetic and *a posteriori* is itself neither analytic and *a priori* nor synthetic and *a posteriori*. There is therefore at least one synthetic *a priori* judgment on this view; thus judgment empiricism is false» (Westphal 1989, 49). Actually, in such a form Judgment empiricism is not a reflexively self-consistent view. I do not think, though, that it is possible to make the same objection to my position. I only maintain, more modestly, the negation of the synthetic *a priori* as a *hypothesis* made plausible both by the scientific developments that led to the *désagrégation* of Kant synthetic *a priori* (as Reichenbach used to say in 1935–36), and by a structural aspect of that same empirical knowledge that led to such a *désagrégation*. I am referring to the fact that empirical knowledge seems structurally subject to two contrasting principles: the very well known principle of empirical underdetermination of theories and the less known, but equally important principle of the theoretical overdetermination of experience (see Parrini 2003). Therefore the negation of the synthetic *a priori* is simply a hypothesis suggested by the historical experience of the development of scientific knowledge, hypothesis that as such I defended as one of the principles of an epistemological theory which has to be considered as tentative and fallible as any other (Parrini 2002a: 190f.).

³ I use the expression «coercive» in Nozick's (1981: 1–27) sense. For my view of epistemic reflection, see the Answer to Question 6 on Skepticism.

and Pragmatism.⁴

The existence of this difference, however, does not preclude that both my empirical realism and Professor Westphal's realism *sans phrase* afford vindication of the reality of molar objects falling under our observational possibilities and of the entities posed by the best of our scientific theories (scientific realism). One aspect of Professor Westphal's work that I appreciate the most is his criticism of van Fraassen's constructive empiricism (see, in particular, Westphal 2014a; 2016d). To go a bit more in depth, I think it is best to start from our different ways of approaching Kant.

2. Professor Westphal's book on Kant takes as its starting point Jacobi's well known objection according to which without the *Ding an sich* it is not possible to enter Kant's system and with the *Ding an sich* it is not possible to stay within it. While Neo-Kantians and the so called epistemic interpretations try to neutralize such an objection by conceiving the *Ding an sich* as some sort of limit idea, or by weakening the distinction between empirical phenomenal objects and *Dingen an sich* from an ontological-metaphysical to a purely methodological distinction, Professor Westphal objects to these readings without recurring to the complicated device of postulating duplicate entities (empirical-phenomenal objects and *Dingen an sich*) and affections (transcendental affection and empirical affection). He takes the bull by the horns and tries to show – in particular against Henry H. Allison's epistemic interpretation (1983¹/2004²) – that it is possible to remove the apparent inconsistency highlighted by Jacobi not only without denying, but even highlighting the metaphysical-ontological presuppositions of the critical-transcendental approach to the problem of knowledge (Westphal 2004a: 4f., 38–41, 116–118).

I must specify that, in spite of my considering as an exaggeration the *patchwork theory* supported by some scholars, I still have doubts about

⁴ The latest work in which I again considered this question is «Esercizi di equilibrio in filosofia» (Parrini forthcoming; here you may also find references to relevant prior works).

the possibility of reaching an interpretation able to account coherently for all the aspects of Kant's texts, and in particular of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The same unquestionable and crucial acquisitions contained in Professor Westphal's 2004 book, and the possibility of using them for a realism *sans phrase* instead of a transcendental idealism, lead me to think that already in Kant's works, in a more or less underground way, we can find the reasons that make a <coercive> solution to the realism/anti-realism contrast almost unfeasible, and that our interpretative difficulties are also the symptom of alternative theoretical possibilities which for various reasons, including his conditioning by the philosophical-scientific context of his time, Kant himself was not able fully to see and explore. Of course, I do not say this to limit the importance of the work carried out by Professor Westphal, who has significantly increased the transparency of many pages of Kant's text. Even I, who differently from him relate to Kant by developing a systematic reading strongly influenced by Cassirer's Neo-Kantianism and the epistemic interpretation, do not believe in the least that the conceptual knots that I favor can provide the basis for an exhaustive reconstruction of Kant's texts, and not even for a more comprehensive and globally adequate reconstruction than the one defended by Professor Westphal.

In order to better highlight the point I am interested in, I will start from a problem that since Herbart's time has constituted a strong reason to revive the realist instance against the claims of transcendental idealism. I am referring to the problem – raised by Herbart (1813¹–1937⁴/–1964: §150) – of how it is possible to attain not knowledge in general nor synthetic a priori knowledge, but *determinate knowledge*, the problem, in other words, regarding particular questions and manifest in specific judgments (see Parrini 1994: 213–219). I think that such a problem is a thorn in the side of Kant's transcendental idealism and so supports some of Professor Westphal's theses. Kant, in fact, recognizes both that we, being a mixture of passivity and spontaneity, cannot know but by receiving *ab extra* the matter that constitutes the sensible manifold, and that the determinate character of knowledge depends on such a sensible manifold, since only reference to what is given in experience allows us to explain

why in some circumstances we perceive a circle rather than a square, or why the light of the sun in some cases (for example, clay) causes its hardening whereas in others (for example, wax) causes its melting (cf. Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 610, A765f./B793f.). All this means that we recognize some form of *externalism*, in other words: the fact that our knowledge is conditioned by something structured that is external to us (see Parrini 1994, in particular: §§ 5–6; 2015b). It is in this sense, I think, that Professor Westphal showed how some realist «pushes» can already be found in Kant together with the anti-realist ones, and he has exploited at best those aspects of the critical position that can be turned in support of a «realism *sans phrase*» (for example, its distinction from an idealism that includes also the matter of knowledge).

I shall place instead at the center of attention those aspects of the critical position that are an obstacle to realism, starting from a statement that we find in the «Refutation of Idealism»⁵. In «Note 3» of the «Refutation», Kant states again that he tried «to prove», against Descartes and Berkeley, «that inner experience in general is possible only through outer experience in general» (Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 247, B278f.), in other words «that the existence of outer things is required for the possibility of a determinate consciousness of the self» (Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 247, B278). At the same time, though, he feels the need to specify that from his confutation «it does not follow that every intuitive representation of outer things involves the existence of these things, for their representation can very well be the product merely of the imagination (as in dreams and delusions)» (Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985, 247, B276). Kant adds that to ascertain «whether this or that supposed experience be not purely imaginary», we must look both at the «special determinations» of such an experience and to its «congruence with the criteria of all real experience» (Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 247, B278f.). For him, in fact, «truth and illusion is not in the object, in so far as it is intuited, but in the judgment about it, ... *i.e.* only in the relation of the object to our understanding»

⁵ For detailed analysis of the Kantian text in which the conceptual knots I favor for systematic reasons appear, see Cinzia Ferrini's (2014) essay on the illusions of imagination in Kant's first *Critique*.

(Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 296, A293=B350).

In «Remark III» of the *Prolegomena* Kant had already intervened on this same question stating that

the difference between truth and dreaming is not ascertained by the nature of representations which are referred to objects (for they are the same in both cases), but by their connection according to those rules which determine the coherence of the representations in the concept of an object, and by ascertaining whether they can subsist together in experience or not. (Kant 1783/1977: 34; AA 4:290)

As we know, for Kant norms and criteria of any truthful experience precisely consist of those conditions that in «The Postulates of Empirical Thought» are used to characterize the (alethic) modalities of possibility, reality (in the sense of *Wirklichkeit*) and necessity as pure a priori concepts of the intellect (categories) that «have the peculiarity that, in determining an object, they do not in the least enlarge the concept to which they are attached as predicates. They only express the relation of the concept to the faculty of knowledge» (Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 239, A219/B266). In fact Kant defines *wirklich* as what, in addition to agreeing with the «formal conditions of experience» («that is, with the conditions of intuition and of concepts») regarding the category of possibility, «is bound up with the material conditions of experience, that is, with sensation» (Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 239, A218=B265f.).

In order not to overlook an essential aspect of transcendental idealism, this characterization of reality must be linked to a passage contained in the first version of the transcendental deduction of categories, in which Kant asks the question about «what we mean by the expression «an object of representations», and more precisely about «what [...] is to be understood when we speak of an object corresponding to, and consequently also distinct from, our knowledge». Kant's answer is that «this object must be thought only as something in general = *x*, since outside our knowledge we have nothing which we could set over against this knowledge as corresponding to it». And

since we have to deal only with the manifold of our representations, and since that x (the object) which corresponds to them is nothing to us – being, as it is something that has to be distinct from all our representations – the unity which the object makes necessary can be nothing else than the formal unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of representations. (Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 134*f.*, A104*f.*)

This way of intending the object of knowledge has given rise to very different interpretations including openly phenomenalist and idealistic ones. For me there is no doubt that Kant did not intend to state that the object of knowledge is the product of the cognitive activity of the human mind. This interpretation is not only incompatible with many aspects of his thought, but is also contradicted by some explicit statements, first of all that contained in §14 of the transcendental deduction of categories. Here he declares that «the representation» determines or constitutes a priori the object not in the sense of producing it «in so far as *existence* is concerned, for we are not here speaking of its causality by means of the will», but in the sense that it makes it possible «to *know* anything as an object» (Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 125*f.*, A92/B125). It is integral to Kant's transcendental-epistemic reflection – the importance of which has been meritoriously highlighted by Professor Westphal (2004a: 16–18) – that the human intellect is neither an ectypus intellect nor an archetypus intellect; it is a mixture of passivity and activity. The material of knowledge, the sensible manifold, is not a product of the human intellect: it is received by the intellect via the a priori forms of sensibility and is shaped by the forms of the intellect to give rise to the object as a knowable and known empirical-phenomenal object. For this reason, Kant says,

though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience. For it may well be that even our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive through impressions and of what our own faculty of knowledge (sensible impressions serving merely as the occasion) supplies from itself. (Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 41*f.*, B1*f.*)

For reasons I cannot examine here I think that, also after having excluded the possibility of interpreting Kant's idealism in a material sense, this

idealism is still untenable in principle, also for the new and important reasons produced by Professor Westphal (whose considerations can be connected with the developments of evolutionary epistemology⁶). What remains for me, though, is the fact that, in the cited passage about what we must mean by the object of knowledge, Kant clearly states that conceiving the object as a reality *epistemically* totally independent of the cognitive activity seems to frustrate the possibility of any criterion which allows us to evaluate the correctness, adequacy or truth of our cognitive claims as cognitively determinate claims. This is because – as Kant says – «*outside our knowledge we have nothing which we could set over against this knowledge as corresponding to it*» (Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 134f., A104f., emphasis added). As we well know, this is one of the difficulties – for me the first and decisive one – that torment all the forms of metaphysical realism, based as they are on an absolutist conception of the object of knowledge and on a correspondence theory of truth⁷.

For all these reasons I see in Kant the forerunner of those conceptions of epistemic relativism that, against metaphysical realism, have highlighted the following three points: (i) our cognitive activity develops within a framework of presuppositions (which are for me not only of a linguistic, but also of a theoretical and methodological nature); (ii) within the complex of our cognitive claims there is something more than what we can justify on the basis of experience alone (epistemological anti-reductionism); and (iii) in principle it is not possible to compare our epistemic-conceptual frameworks with a reality in itself, non-conceptualized, to evaluate their conformity or their correspondence with it.

What I have been saying so far affects the conception of truth that Kant delineates in some short passages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. These passages show that logical-transcendental idealism, although it

⁶ See, in particular, Westphal (2004a: 84).

⁷ Some authors such as Michael Devitt and John Searle maintain forms of realism not beholden to the correspondence theory of truth. It seems to me, though, that against them we can bring the critical remarks made in an essay included in the book under discussion, *Realism, Science, and Pragmatism*: J. Knowles «Naturalism without Metaphysics» (2014, esp.: 205–207).

rejects the possibility of knowing the *Ding an sich* or considered in itself, and thus rejects metaphysical realism, does not imply either an epistemological nihilism (according to which an object of knowledge non-metaphysically conceived would be a pure nothing) (see Parrini 2011b: 165*f.*) or a sort of *knock out argument* against any form of realism (see Parrini 2001). Kant's idealism, in some regards like an Aristotelian view, accepts a correspondence conception of truth, though qualifying it as a mere «nominal definition» of truth (Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 97, A58=B82), and on the criterial level makes the truth of a sentence such as «Snow is white» depend not only on satisfaction of the formal conditions of knowledge, but also its material conditions (Kant 1781¹–1787²/1985: 97–99, A57–62=B82–86; see Parrini 1994: 198–203). This means that for Kant too the truth of the judgment «Snow is white» depends on the fact that certain material conditions of knowledge, in other words certain empirical data (the whiteness of the snow), are given, rather than that the existence of such conditions depends on the truth of the cognitive claim that the snow is white. Where Kant departs from the traditional realist view is only when he says that for us discussing of truth and falsity is cognitively possible not with respect to a world of *Dingen an sich* (or *per se* considered), but with respect to a world of phenomena epistemically conditioned by our forms of sensibility and intellect (see Parrini 2015b: 44–47)⁸.

3. Since Kant's time a lot of water has passed under the bridge. In particular, many epistemologists have refused the Kantian conception of synthetic a priori principles. Cognitive activity, though, and epistemological reflection upon it, continued to show both the aspects that push towards realism and the aspects that push towards anti-realism in a balance of pros and cons that leads me to despair of the possibility of solving the *Realismusfrage* on a rigorously and exclusively demonstrative level (see

⁸ It seems to me that in his *The Revolutionary Kant. A Commentary on the «Critique of Pure Reason»* (2006) Graham Bird underestimates the meaning and importance of Kant's conception of truth. For this and other observations on Bird's interpretation, see Parrini (2010a: 507, n. 19; 515–517, n. 36).

Parrini 2001). In this balance the Kantian argument stressed above, that we do not have at our disposal a criterion of truth based on a comparison between the *ordo idearum* and the *ordo rerum*, or better between our cognitive claims and reality in itself, still plays a role that I deem decisive. Please note that by saying <decisive>, I do not mean demonstrative. I do not use this argument as a demonstration capable of blocking metaphysical realism. In other words, I do not maintain that, because we cannot access reality in a non-epistemically conditioned way, the notion of reality in itself or absolute reality is a notion devoid of sense, or a contradictory, or a totally void. Supporting this idea (as logical empiricists have often done) would mean committing a *non sequitur* rightly denounced for example by Frederick Will (1979), a philosopher dear to Professor Westphal and by him justly appreciated in his book on Hegel's epistemological realism (1989: 63f.). I think, though, that the conflict between the will to maintain the notion of reality in itself and the impossibility of establishing a connection between such a reality and our cognitive claims is – using Professor Westphal's own expression – «compelling»; and compelling to such a degree that I do not think this conflict can be solved by an epistemological conception capable, at the same time, of overwhelming the skeptic and putting together – as Professor Westphal says in his book on Hegel – «a coherence criterion of truth [...] with a correspondence analysis of truth» (1989: 64).

That is why it seemed to me (and still seems) that an epistemological answer trying to be – as Hegel rightly asked (see Westphal 1989: 16) – reflexively self-consistent can and has to be looked for, in a Herbartian spirit, in a reworking of concepts, or, if we prefer, in their elaboration in the sense of a Carnapian explication. So I tried to find some <explications> of the notions of truth and reality that, once broken their ties with the ontological-metaphysical presuppositions from which aporias and dyscrasias derive, could be as close as possible to, and coherent with, our cognitive (or doxastic, or epistemic) practices. That's because, although I appreciate the importance and acumen with which Professor Westphal saved Kant from Jacobi's objection without abandoning the ontological-metaphysical aspect of Kant's Transcendental Idealism, I think that the

problem of knowledge should be developed via an *epoché* from existential presuppositions and thus continuing on the road marked out not only by Husserl (followed by Carnap⁹), but also by Cassirer. Cassirer, in fact, starting from Kantian thought and Jacobi's criticism, has supported a statement of this problem that inquires into the conditions of validity of the different types of judgments without previously taking for granted the distinction between «the soul and the things» (Cassirer 1911¹/1922³: 662f.). In other words, without posing preliminary claims of an ontological kind, and thus abandoning the pre-Kantian formulation, which, in order to understand the connection between the (knowing) ego and the (known) things, projected them both onto a «common metaphysical background» (*ibid.*). For Kant the matter of inquiry is «no longer made up of the things, but of the judgments on the things» (*ibid.*): «judgment and object are strictly correlative concepts, so that in the critical sense, the truth [= reality] of the object is always to be grasped and substantiated only through the truth of the judgment» (Cassirer 1918/1981: 285).

4. Here I cannot retrace the reasons that led me, starting from this statement and seeking to avoid the extremes both of metaphysical realism and alethic relativism (see Parrini 1995/1998; 2001; 2002a; 2011), to explicate the notions of truth and reality as regulative ideals that guide our cognitive activity towards syntheses or objectivizing unifications richer and richer in empirical material and more and more compact, simple, harmonious and conceptually and theoretically comprehensive¹⁰. I shall

⁹ For my interpretation of the relationship between Husserl and Carnap, with particular reference to the notion of explication, the use of *epoché*, and the genesis of the concept of empirical reality in *Der logische Aufbau der Welt* and in *Scheinprobleme in der Philosophie*, see Parrini (2012a: 82–95).

¹⁰ In his book on Hegel, Professor Westphal (1989: 245, n. 118) quotes a paper in which Otto Neurath rejects the notion of truth preferring to it the notion of «plausibility» because «true» and «false» are *absolute* terms» that should be avoided (Neurath 1940–41: 138f., emphasis added). In a certain sense, I recover the «absolute» value of the notion of truth, but I qualify it as a regulative ideal that is purely formal and empty «critically». This means that the application of the category of truth is not determined by methodological and/or theoretical principles conceived as the necessary (let alone the necessary and sufficient) conditions

limit myself to highlighting the most significant points of convergence and divergence between my position and Professor Westphal's.

Professor Westphal's conception is anti-foundationalist and anti-Cartesian; I too think that the cognitive process, which is paradigmatically evident in scientific activity, cannot count on supporting points, either external or internal, that guarantee its absolute foundation. It rests only on itself: its pivotal elements are some beliefs that it provisionally accepts (for empirical and/or rational reasons) and then it searches for possible areas of empirical intersection between alternative hypotheses and theories evaluating other beliefs. This continuous self-correcting movement, virtually endless, can touch not only the beliefs that have been screened, but also those initially not questioned or even presupposed. As for Professor Westphal, who in his book on Hegel also ties in Peirce's fallibilism, also in my view the true (intended, though, as a regulative ideal) does not collapse into on the justified. In fact, the function I assign to truth remains that which derives from our realist instinct which implies that even the best justified beliefs can be revised in the light of the new acquisitions of research. In sum, for me too the notion of truth has the functions to keep *open* the possibility that we can always be

for its use. As I too reject metaphysical realism, my conception of truth is not linked to two kinds of absolutism rightly criticized by Neurath: the absolutism of the correspondence theory of truth and the absolutism of the absolutely valid principles of reason and knowledge. Since – for reasons that are ultimately linked to the old neoempiricist criticism of the theory of *a priori* synthetic judgments – it does not seem possible to tie the unifying effort that constitutes knowledge to any content-determined cognitive norm, the notion of truth as a regulative ideal has to be conceived as an empty category that fills itself with the criteria and contents of judging that emerge, confront themselves and gradually impose themselves in the course of the changing turns of historical events. Knowing then becomes a process that constantly renews itself and finds only relative resting points. These resting points and the evaluation criteria connected to them give a content (specifiable only as they both occur) to the categories of objectivity and truth when such categories are applied to concrete cases and particular judgments. This leaves untouched the unitary <transcendence> of the categories of objectivity and truth as ideals of a potentially infinite series of cognitive processes intentionally aimed at their realization. For my interpretation of the transcendence/immanence relation in the cognitive process, see Parrini 1995/1998 («Foreword to the English Edition») and 1999.

wrong, even in the case of beliefs that to our eyes are supported or corroborated by the best reasons we have been able to find. The difference with metaphysical realism, though, lies in the fact that in my conception this openness made possible by keeping the notion of truth is not towards things in themselves or considered in themselves, but is towards *experience* assumed in its ideal inexhaustibility and interpreted and organized by and in our always modifiable or renewable rational procedures.

The notion of reality, as much as the one of truth, also must be considered as a category to be intended, keeping in mind our concrete and effective cognitive practices, and thus purifying it from the metaphysical encrustations associated with it in its ordinary use, which is ill-considered and philosophically uncritical. In fact, if, taking the hint from a famous saying by Einstein (1936: 313), we look, not at what we say we do when we try to know something, but at what we actually do, we immediately see that in this attempt of ours reality *in itself* does not intervene in any way. Within our efforts of theoretical-argumentative elaboration, the only other operative role is played by the data of experience which we can exploit or which we can produce via new experiments.

Like the notion of truth, also the notion of empirical reality I defend must be conceived as a regulative ideal. It allows us to explicate non-metaphysically the realist instinct that actually pervades our cognitive efforts, both commonsense and scientific. This realist instinct must be intended, not as the confident though naive intent (destined to fall under the blows of skeptical objection) to catch something of reality in itself, but as the effort that proved to be historically fruitful of approaching more and more an epistemically optimal integration of empirical data and rational components. For this reason I consider objectivity a task that is realized in ever partial and reviewable achievements. In my perspective, the conquest of the truth with a capital <T> would be to reach a <definitively> accomplished integration of the conceptual and the empirical moments. However, this <perfect> integration can only be intended as another regulative ideal, in principle unreachable, given the inexhaustibility of experience and perhaps also of our inventive capacities (cf. Parrini 2013/forthcoming).

In an analogous way we can explicate the (greater or lesser) feeling of certainty which accompanies our partial, provisional and reviewable cognitive syntheses. This feeling must not be intended as the more or less strong persuasion of having touched reality in itself, or having approached it, but as the more or less sound conviction of having reached beliefs that are unlikely to be affected by the subsequent developments of knowledge and thus have very good titles to posit their candidacy as part, in one way or another, of the <final> beliefs of an ideal and never obtainable <definitive> synthesis between empirical material and rational elements (cf. Parrini 2013/forthcoming).

Within empirical realism as I conceive it, that commonsense dualism (so dear to both Professor Westphal and myself) that recognizes an existence to us as knowing subjects, on the one hand, and the molar objects and events in space and time peculiar to our common experience on the other, can legitimately be considered a framework of reference developed on the basis of experience and raised to the rank of presupposition of our own typical cognitive practices. What empirical realism requires is only that such a dualism is intended not as an ontological-metaphysical dualism (in other words, as true because it conforms to reality in itself), but as a dualism that I would call ontic (see Parrini 2011b: 21*f*.; 2015b: § 5; 2015c: 69–75). With the expression <ontic> I wish to underline that this framework has asserted itself as a *Naturprodukt* (in Mach's words [1886¹–1911⁶/2008: 41]) capable of accounting in the most epistemically acceptable way for our inner and external experience, in other words of the experience of subjects who live in a world of medium-sized objects, far both from the microcosm of the indefinitely small and the macrocosm of the indefinitely large.

This dualism must be considered true or real, or better, presumably true or real, in the non-metaphysical sense of truth or reality I specified above. It seems to me that such a conception grows stronger when we consider, as Professor Westphal taught us (2014a), that the mere logical possibility that is global perceptual skepticism – the counterpart to foundationalistic philosophies of a Cartesian kind – if evaluated in the light of Newton's Rule 4 of experimental philosophy and Kant's (and Hegel's)

cognitive semantics, is nothing but an idle metaphysical speculation. It must be understood, though, that for an empirical realist who also is a scientific realist, relativity theory and quantum mechanics are limitations which he must accommodate. These two theories show that both the domain of the indefinitely large and some peculiar physical measuring interactions we have in the domain of the indefinitely small require a more complex cognitive relation than the one offered by common sense to describe the ontic (non-ontological) relationship between subject and object of knowledge.

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