The Metacritique of Kant and the Possibility of Metaphysics

Hasan Spiker

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Summary

This short study introduces and evaluates the most fundamental paradox at the core of Kant's philosophy. This is the 'metacritical' problem of whether Kant's critical project is itself possible, a possibility that the same project has made it its mission to deny to traditional metaphysics. Kant himself held that his conclusions were merely the impartial result of an examination of the 'instrument' by means of which that metaphysics claims to have established its conclusions, human cognition itself. Yet did Kant see the implied need to subject his own critical philosophy to such a test, since it equally presupposes 'human cognition'?

Although this problem has been deemed one of the most fundamental, and indeed critical, in all Kant's philosophy by several prominent Kant exegetes, devoted treatments of the question are extremely scarce. Drawing on Platonic philosophy and the philosophical system outlined in the author's *Things As They Are* (2021), the study concludes that the metacritical problem is indeed fatal to Kant's anti-metaphysical aspirations, and that this elimination of such a fundamental obstacle to the practice of traditional philosophy further opens up the real possibility of a renewed metaphysics for our time.

About the Author

HASAN SPIKER is a researcher at Tabah Foundation, and spent twelve years studying the Islamic intellectual sciences in the Middle East. He subsequently completed a philosophy degree at the University of London, and an MPhil in philosophical theology at the University of Cambridge, where he is also presently completing his doctoral studies, and carrying out research at the Cambridge Centre for the Study of Platonism.

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All praise is to Allah alone, the Lord of the Worlds
And may He send His benedictions upon
our master Muḥammad, his Kin
and his Companions
and grant them
peace

❦

PREFACE

This short paper introduces the most fundamental paradox at the core of Kant's philosophy. This is generally branded the 'metacritical' question, and it concerns the very possibility of his critical project. In our estimation, it is fatal to his anti-metaphysical aspirations.

It must be confessed, despite the risk of gratuitous self-reference, that it is also a paradox that I uncovered for myself, in the course of repeatedly returning to grapple with Kant's work while studying the Islamic *ʿulūm*. This merely constitutes testimony to the intrinsic intelligibility of reality, because incidentally (and as I later discovered), anyone holding to this conclusion about Kant's philosophy finds themselves in good company; as will become evident in this paper, many of Kant's contemporaries and major philosophical successors could not assent to his claim to have truly effected a 'Copernican' revolution, even if some of them justly revered Kant for certain other aspects of his intellectual contribution. Drawing on the many insights of these scholars and philosophers, it is my hope that the argument of this short paper will go some way towards showing how very far from decisive Kant's 'dethroning' of metaphysics really was. Intellectual fashion, when all is said and done, has never been a very good discerner of truth.

Metaphysics has been practised for as long as the hierarchical structures of human reason have encountered the hierarchical structure of being itself. This is because the practice of the universal science is an entailment of human nature, reflecting the intrinsic structure of the mind, and in virtue of the nature of reason itself, cannot but uncover the intrinsic structure of being *outside* of the mind. And by the testimony of recurrent history, in the presence of the numinous, and as long as it has had the good fortune to coincide with the revelation of a religious dispensation, true metaphysics has duly taken its place as the handmaiden of theology. For the former constitutes the natural instrument by which human cognition becomes intimately acquainted with the ordering of the world and the miracle of its intelligibility; and when it has been faced with the immeasurably heightened resolution effected by revelation, it has thus duly positioned that revelation at the apex of its isomorphic schemes of logic and ontology.

Even be it that the histories of modernity and secularization are often depicted, largely accurately, as the histories of the attempt to divest us of this divine gift of metaphysics, to deny it and to demean it, in Western society for a thousand years at least until the Reformation, and in the Islamic world until a much more recent date, metaphysical reason was 'an organ bearing the same relation to spiritual objects, the universal, the eternal, and the necessary, as the eye bears to material and contingent phenomena'[1] — even if it has not always been described with the poetry of a Coleridge.

By the exercise of this 'organ' or faculty, and its attendant formal discipline, something of the intelligible structure governing sensible reality is uncovered, and in this structure, the vestiges of Divine realities. Universal science (العلم الكلي, *scientia*

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend: A Series of Essays to Aid in the Formation of Fixed Principles in Politics, Morals and Religion*, *Coleridge: Complete Works Vol. II* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853), 144.

universalis, ἐπιστήμη καθόλου) or first philosophy (الفلسفة الاولى, *prima philosophia*, πρώτη φιλοσοφία) is able to come to conclusions about this underlying intelligible structure that are apodictic, that is, representative of true knowledge or 'science' (علم, *scientia*, ἐπιστήμη). Moreover, it is metaphysics which recognizes, in the deepest places of the intellect, the truth of revelation and of the spirit, and that concedes to that revelation and to that spirit certain realms in which the innate structures of reason cannot rely on their native resources to arrive at the full truth about the unseen.

Through long centuries, in their metaphysics Plato, Alcinous, Numenius, Plotinus, Iamblichus and Proclus, Dionysius, Avicenna and John Scotus Erigena, al-Ghazālī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Suhrawardī, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī and Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, Bonaventure and Meister Eckhart, Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī and Berthold of Moosburg, Ibn Turka, Mulla Fenari and Nicolas of Cusa, Marsilio Ficino and Ibn Kemal, Ibn Bahā'uddīn and Ralph Cudworth, Ibrāhīm Kūrānī and Mīr Dāmād, Coleridge and ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāi'irī (and a plethora of earlier and later figures, not inferior in status) have charted the precincts and sanctuaries of the universal and the particular, the abstract and the concrete, the imaginal and the sensible, the transcendental and the exclusive. In depicting the environs of the intelligible world, and the manner in which the sensible world of flux receives its being by participation in its splendour, the differences between these great cartographers of the intelligible have no doubt been engendered by disparities in sharpness of vision, aptness of instrument, sanctitude of heart and the removal of obstacles. For though they be far less numerous than the conclusions which they hold in common, differences there indeed are. All, nonetheless, have agreed, each in their own way, that their science of metaphysics is efficacious, and that when a true master sets its apparatuses in motion and follows them to their end, the super-sensible knowledge it promises is indeed to be obtained.

Yet one of the most important revolutions that reshaped Europe throughout the period spanning the 16th to the 18th centuries, was the adoption and development of forms of thinking that no longer believed human knowing could hope, via its first principles, its henological and ontological intuitions, its universalizing, abstract apparatuses, and its figures of logic, to make contact with an intelligible rather than purely physical structure underlying the world, or with realities incorporeal. The stirring story is familiar; in the Middle Ages, metaphysics was honoured as the handmaiden of the Queen, or indeed as the Queen of the Sciences, depending upon whether metaphysics was to be identified with theology or no. But with the ruptures of the Reformation this pre-eminence diminished, and withdrew chiefly into the Catholic strongholds of Europe where in Cajetan, Suarez and others, it became increasingly rigid, formulaic, indeed at times dogmatic, and soon came to be replaced by Descartes' solipsistic metaphysics, a 'metaphysics' alienated from the mechanical analysis of extended body, until this was in turn superseded by a yet more brittle 'neoscholasticism'. In the Protestant heartlands of the North, the empiricist corpuscularianism of a Hobbes or a Locke held sway, the stage for which had been set by that very philosophy of nominalism, with its sole recognition of the empirical and the particular, that had heralded the end of the High Middle Ages. Speaking of the situation in the British Isles when this absorption in the particular and the empirical had reached the point of spiritual illness, Thomas Carlyle would famously lament, writing in the 1820s, that 'Our whole metaphysics itself from Locke's time downwards, has been physical; not a spiritual philosophy, but a material one'.[2] An earlier dissenter from the mechanistic zeitgeist, no less a cultural figure than William Blake, had been equally emphatic about the spiritual degradation of corpuscularian empiricism, going so far as to declare that 'Bacon's

2. *Signs of the Times* in Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays in Seven Volumes* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872), vol. 2, 237.

philosophy has Ruin'd England'.[3] Those who had witnessed the Cartesian sundering of body and mind had despaired of ever marrying them again, a despair that would continue to grip their grandchildren of the Enlightenment age. Carlyle again:

> Consider ... the state of Science generally, in Europe, at this period. It is admitted, on all sides, that the Metaphysical and Moral Sciences are falling into decay, while the Physical are engrossing, every day, more respect and attention. In most of the European nations there is now no such thing as a Science of Mind; only more or less advancement in the general science, or the special sciences, of matter.[4]

Though a shadow of its former self, stripped of its institutional frameworks, its universally acknowledged principles, and the peer-review structures of scholastic commentary and supercommentary, metaphysics had clung, however wraithlike, to life in the 18th century on the Continent, in the guises of Cartesianism, Leibnizianism and Wolffianism; it would be left to Kant to cast it finally into the abyss: or so he thought. In the wake of the attacks of Kant, and the assumptions—made by both friend and foe of Kant in the analytic and continental traditions that he spawned—concerning the rightness of what were really (as we will see) Kant's *assumptions* about the impossibility of traditional metaphysics, it ceased to be the chief arbiter within an integrated framework of the sciences in the Western university. Metaphysics thus turned into that strange curiosity that it remains, hidden away in an ever-shrinking philosophy department. Yet it is a curiosity that nonetheless continues to disconcert its now dominant detrac-

3. William Blake, *Complete Writings: With Variant Readings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 456.

4. Ibid., 236.

tors, in continuing—by its intrinsic nature no less—to be the only possible resort, despite its now officially marginal status, for answers to the most general and foundational questions.

Much more, of course, could be said about the dramatic fate of metaphysics, and the twists and turns of its history. For our present purposes, this little paper serves as a mere 'clearing away of the brush' of anti-metaphysical fashion, and of course lays no claim to anything like comprehensiveness, nor does it presume to have carried out an exhaustive examination of the subject that it treats. Indeed, it might on that account be fruitfully perused alongside our (much more extended) *Things as They Are*, in which more constructive proposals for a revived metaphysics have been put forward, as well as manifest warrant for its continuing possibility, rooted in the Islamic tradition (and, indeed, the book also contains more on Kant).

I am especially grateful to Mustafa Aziz of Harvard University, for reading an early draft of this paper and providing me with valuable comments, as well as drawing my attention to a key philosophical text in Kant's correspondence; all of this has enriched my thinking on these questions.

1.1
INTRODUCTION

In a public declaration that would prove to be one of his last letters, Immanuel Kant assures the broad philosophical milieu of his time that 'the system of the *Critique* rests on a fully secured foundation, established forever'; and he affirms that 'it will be indispensable too for the noblest ends of mankind in all future ages.'[5] Throughout the history of the reception of Kant, there have, naturally, been many varieties of demurral regarding the reality of this 'fully secured foundation', and in what follows, we will examine one that has received comparatively little attention, but which, a strong case can be made, may be the most foundational of all objections to Kant's secure foundations. It has been called 'a good candidate for the deepest, most intractable, and potentially paradoxical of the problems in Kant's legacy.'[6]

This is the question of whether Kant's critical project *is itself possible*, a possibility that the same project has made it its mission to deny to traditional metaphysics, ostensibly as the result of an impartial examination of the 'instrument' by means of which that metaphysics claims to have established its conclusions, human cognition itself. Yet did Kant see the implied need to subject his *own* critical philosophy to such a test, since it equally presupposes 'human cognition'? Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this problem is that although it is deemed one of the most fundamental, and indeed critical, in all Kant's philosophy by numerous prominent Kant exegetes, Kant could scarcely rouse himself to acknowledge its existence.[7] Despite all

5. *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence 1759-99*, trans. Arnulf Zweig (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 254.

6. Robert B. Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005), 40.

7. W.H. Walsh tells us, for example, that the 'crucial' question of how the critical philosophy is *itself* possible is given 'little or no attention' by Kant himself.

this, or perhaps because of it, it remains a strikingly neglected islet, still befogged amidst a vastness of the many great seas and landmasses of Kant scholarship.

In what follows, one of our tasks will be to investigate a diverse array of approaches to this decisive but unloved area of Kant studies, and attempt to draw out the features and most compelling conclusions *shared* by the various 'metacritiques' of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Yet before we acquaint ourselves with some of the specific and most characteristic targets of metacritique, it would be apt to seek to capture the basic starting points that the various philosophical endeavours gathered under this rubric hold in common:

i. Kant's own intellectual project, in order to be consistent with the larger epistemological exigencies and commitments that he prescribes for his system, indeed requires some appropriate variety of the genus of 'critique' to which he has subjected 'dogmatic' metaphysics in his *CpR*, and

ii. This critique is in fact conspicuous by its absence in Kant's own writings, which entails that the same notion of 'dogmatism' cannot but taint the foundations of his own 'critical' project as well.

Yet what is it about Kant's own stated principles that has led a great diversity of critics of Kant to reach these conclusions? In exploring this question, our purpose will be to ascertain which objections are the most fundamental, amongst the many that have been raised by Kant exegetes of all stripes, throughout the history of the reception of his thought. By identifying the charges of inconsistency held almost universally by this diverse range of thinkers, we will be able to determine which of them have generated the overall 'metacritical' question of the 'possibility' of Kant's project in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. To this

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See Walsh's *Kant's Criticism of Metaphysics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975), 249, and below.

end, rather than focusing narrowly on a single approach to the problem, we will in some measure range broadly over the criticisms raised by some significantly disparate thinkers, in order to bring out the elements of consensus in the various metacritical approaches that they advance. We will then subject these and alternative viewpoints to some degree of critical analysis, and seek to determine whether Kant can escape from such serious charges of inconsistency with his 'critical' and philosophical credentials intact, especially his claim to have disproved the possibility of traditional metaphysics.

In this introduction, we will define what it is that we mean when we ask, 'how is Kant's "critical" project possible?'. This will be followed by section 1.2, in which we examine the perceived aporia widely acknowledged to be the single most significant philosophical motivation for Kant's 'critical turn', viz., the seemingly irresolvable question of how 'representations' can possibly agree with, and relate and refer to, 'objects' (given Kant's entrenched dualistic assumptions about both). This difficulty was first framed in a manner resembling its subsequently enduring form in a 1772 letter to Marcus Herz; as we progress into the later sections of this paper, it will become clear that this is the single most tenacious and unnegotiable dualism that begets Kant's many subsequent dualisms, and indeed the indefatigably dualistic tenor of Kant's overall thinking. After this, we will provide a short exposition of the most fundamental 'critical' conclusions that Kant would later come to think that he had reached justifiably, as results yielded by the argumentative structure of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, built upon what we might call his 'first assumptions'. This concise summary of Kant's critical project will stand us in good stead when, in the subsections of 2.1, we provide sketches of the history of the problem under consideration in this essay, and explore the implications for Kant's project entailed by the claim that he has ultimately merely *assumed* that a 'critique of reason' of the type he discharges *is itself possible*. The contrast between Kant's stated critical conclusions, and the absence in

his writings of adequate accounts of the epistemological procedures by which he has been able to reach these conclusions, will have the effect of allowing us to discern which of his conclusions seem most glaringly to have been arrived at without any examination or justification of the means, the 'instrument' he has employed in order to achieve those conclusions. We will finish, as is customary, with a conclusion (2.2). To commence:

The central problematic involved in the question of whether the *Critique* itself can be consistently judged possible on Kant's own principles can be summed up in the following line of reasoning. It is evident that the principles and results of Kant's critical philosophy cannot employ the synthesis of sensibility and understanding which Kant assures us is the *sine qua non* of genuine knowledge. This is evinced most proximately in the very fact that *the claim that all knowledge must necessarily be a composite of concept and intuition, does not itself constitute an instance of the fusion of concept and intuition that this very claim has prescribed.*

The same is true of Kant's claim that we *impose* time and space and the Categories upon the world, rather than their being abstracted therefrom (on the broadly Aristotelian account) or their constituting a prior, self-existent framework in which the sensible world must participate in order to exist (on the broadly Platonic account).[8] Manifestly, these are not claims which can be verified by 'experience', that is, the fusion of intuition and concept, and this is simply because they do not constitute empirical claims. As W.H. Walsh has characterized the problem:

> We can arrive, in science and in daily life, at many different kinds of truth about things phenomenal ...

8. Naturally, we refer here to *commensurate* notions recognised by broad Aristotelians and Platonists respectively, since Kant's 'Categories', rather than straightforwardly representing any previously recognised rubric, are more akin to a reimagined fusion of some of the Aristotelian Categories, the transcendentals, and the Platonic *megista genē*.

> What we cannot do is know what lies beyond the bounds of possible experience. All our knowledge [in Kant's philosophy] is ultimately rooted in intuitions as well as concepts, and the only form of intuition available to us is sense-intuition. It follows that knowledge, in its human form at least, is basically bound to sense. But what of the claim that it is? Is that supposed to represent a bit of sense-knowledge?[9]

Although Kant has claimed (as we will see below), that he possesses certain, indubitable knowledge of the truth of his principles, they nonetheless represent propositions that are not even strictly speaking knowable according to his own epistemology. As such, they would seem to require a faculty of intellectual (rather than sensible) intuition just in order to be *known*. However, the outright rejection of the notion that human beings possess any such non-sensible faculty of intuition is also one of the cornerstones of Kant's critical philosophy.[10] As Walsh puts it:

> How can anything be said about the activities of the mind in general or mind as such, unless we suppose that it is possible to know other things besides appearances, or unless we appeal to cognitive powers whose existence Kant explicitly denies?[11]

An examination of Kant's philosophy provides few clues to help determine by which faculty Kant himself presumes to establish his own critical conclusions. If it is not possible to substantiate the deeply problematic, paradox-yielding claim

9. W.H. Walsh, *Kant's Criticism of Metaphysics*, 250-251. See also the present author's *Things as They Are: Nafs al-Amr and the Metaphysical Foundations of Objective Truth* (Abu Dhabi: Tabah Foundation, 2021), 50.

10. On this specific point, see the references from the *CpR* below.

11. W.H. Walsh, 'Philosophy and Psychology in Kant's *Critique*', *Kant-Studien*, vol. 57, Issue 1-4, 1966, 186-198.

that Kant possesses *some method of genuinely establishing* the critical principles he employs *in order to carry out his critique* (principles such as 'the understanding and the sensibility are separate faculties', 'they are the *sine qua non* of real knowledge', 'we have no faculty of intellectual intuition', 'the categories cannot exist extramentally, embedded in things-in-themselves', 'time and space are mind-dependent', 'the ideas of pure reason intrinsically yield transcendental illusion' and so on), then it seems clear that the principles by which he establishes his far-reaching conclusions may be assumptions which, if not all wholly groundless, certainly lack the type of 'fully secured foundation, established forever' that could preclude the strong possibility that they are, in fact, entirely false.

Although amongst Kant exegetes past and present there is wide agreement that these considerations constitute genuine challenges to the consistency of Kant's overall project, approaches to the question of whether these are ultimately fatal to his project differ widely. As we will see, although earlier 'metacritics' of Kant's philosophy, such as Johann Georg Hamann, Ernst Platner and Hegel, tend to view as flatly contradictory Kant's demand that the 'instrument' of human cognition be examined, while Kant all the while uncritically employs the same instrument in order to reach his own critical conclusions, more recent commentators like W.H. Walsh, Lewis White Beck and Nicholas Rescher attempt to defend Kant in various ways. We will look at their views somewhat more closely, especially those of Beck, in our final section, and argue that such defences constitute, in essence, mere capitulations to key assumptions of the philosophical modernity of which Kant himself was the primary progenitor, but ironically, represent interpretations of Kant which, it is scarcely contestable, he would himself have rejected in the strongest terms.

1.2
The 'critical turn' letter of 1772 and Kant's uncritical assumptions in the Critique of Pure Reason

In the revered halls of modern philosophy's pantheon of superlative books, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* has been accorded an utterly disproportionate expanse of floor space, enjoying more secondary literature scrutiny than perhaps any other work therein, with the minutiae, seemingly, of every possible aspect of his thought in that work endlessly perlustrated and dissected. Indeed, one of the only exceptions appears to be our very question, to wit, that of whether Kant's project in the *CpR* is even possible at all.

Alacritous students of the philosophical sciences craving the dramatic encounter with Kant's Copernican revolution are thus spoilt and overwhelmed by vast libraries of introductory guides and detailed commentaries on the *CpR*, as well as monographs on every aspect of his thought. It is for this reason that we make no attempt here to provide an introduction to Kant's thought in the *CpR;* rather, in this section we will merely intend to briefly refresh our memories concerning Kant's primary aspirations for his philosophy, and what it is that he believes he has achieved. Before that, however, for the sake of the further light that it sheds on those aspirations, we will observe the unfolding of an important episode from the period of formation, prior to the fully-fledged 'critical turn' away from traditional metaphysics. This is the penning of a pivotal letter of 1772, that Kant addressed to Marcus Herz, one of his most devoted students, and which for many marks no less than the point of no return for Kant's intellectual journey into that famously inverted reality, so idiosyncratically his own, but that is nonetheless everywhere familiar today, at least to the keen-sighted of the children of modernity.

In formulating the key metaphysical and epistemological tension that would motivate Kant to shut himself away to write the *CpR*,[12] and which he first gives voice to in this letter, Kant is motivated by his certainty (despite his having earlier entertained the possibility of unity) that reality is fundamentally dual, that it is *not one*. He then constructs his philosophy to try to show that as the direct consequence of this feature of reality, it is impossible to know reality. It is possible that the self-evident logical impracticability, to say the least, of this quixotic Enlightenment adventure may have been entirely lost on even so acute a mind as Kant; or he may on the other hand have pursued it, regardless of the incalculable cost to good sense that it entails, precisely because he considered the abolishment of metaphysics, which it implies, to represent the epitomic Enlightenment project. What is certain, as we will see in some more detail in section 2.1, is that 'dualisms' like the sharp distinctions between appearance and things-in-themselves, sensibility and understanding, and concept and intuition, were viewed by many prominent post-Kantian thinkers in the immediate aftermath of the *Critique* as egregiously insupportable and indeed hopeless bifurcations of reality, which failed to specify the common principles, the 'principles of unity', to use Platonic language, that could explain how the dual elements were able to interact at all. Yet Kant's dichotomous bent stems from this deeper presumption, that guides the unfolding of his entire philosophical project (including underpinning his decisive distinction between intuition and concept), and that could not help but rigorously predetermine his vision for what the 'Copernican revolution', which he felt philosophy so badly needed, would have to look like when it took shape. This is his odd assumption that knowing and being (although

12. This would occupy the next nine years of his life, although in the letter to Herz he predicts that the work would be finished within three months; this suggests that while the letter was an important catalyst in the formulation of the central problematic of the *CpR*, it does not *itself* represent 'the critical turn'.

he carefully avoids the latter term where at all possible) must be intrinsically shut off from one another, foreign and disconnected, indeed so despairingly alien to one another that the ground for the possible relation between the two can scarcely be conceived.

1.2.1 From *Inaugural Dissertation* to 'the key to the secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics'

One of the most important texts, then, and important in this regard, from Kant's early critical phase is his famous letter of February 21st 1772, to his former student at the University of Königsberg and respondent in the defence of his Inaugural Dissertation, physician and philosopher Marcus Herz.[13] In this letter, Kant most revealingly sets out his plans for his crowning intellectual project, to wit, 'a work that might perhaps have the title, "The Limits of Sense and Reason,"[14] which would divide into 'theoretical' and 'practical' parts. 'As I thought through the theoretical part,' Kant tells Herz,

> considering its whole scope and the reciprocal relations of all its parts, I noticed that I still lacked something essential, something that in my long metaphysical studies I, as well as others, had failed to pay attention to and that, in fact, constitutes the key to the whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics. I asked myself: What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call "representation" to the object?[15]

13. The original title page of the *Inaugural Dissertation* tells us that 'The function of respondent will be undertaken by Marcus Herz of Berlin, of Jewish descent, a student of medicine and philosophy, against opponents …' . See Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, trans. and ed. David Walford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 375.

14. *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence 1759-99*, 71.

15. Ibid.

Kant had already established his signature, and sharp, distinction between sensibility and a broad construal of understanding, in the doctrine of the *Dissertation*,[16] with which Herz was so intimately familiar.[17] Although the Kant of the *Dissertation* maintained, as he would likewise in the *CpR*, that sensibility only provides us with knowledge of appearances due to the subjective influence of the forms of time and space that constitute it, this pre-critical Kant held that the understanding on the other hand gives us knowledge of things as they are.[18] This is the dictum that in his letter to Herz, Kant begins to doubt could possibly be coherent. It seems that Kant is becoming aware of the highly unsatisfactory nature of the account of the origin of this 'knowledge of things as they are' that he had put forward in the *Dissertation*. Modern

16. Kant's philosophical development from the pre-critical phase to the emergence of the critical philosophy is charted in H.J. De Vleeschauwer, *The Development of Kantian Thought: The History of a Doctrine*, trans. A.R.C. Duncan (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), and W. H. Werkmeister, *Kant's Silent Decade: A Decade of Philosophical Development* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1979).

17. 'Sensibility is the receptivity of a subject in virtue of which it is possible for the subject's own representative state to be affected in a definite way by the presence of some object. Intelligence (rationality) is the faculty of a subject in virtue of which it has the power to represent things which cannot by their own quality come before the senses of that subject. The object of sensibility is the sensible; that which contains nothing but what is to be cognised through the intelligence is intelligible. In the schools of the ancients, the former was called a phenomenon and the latter a noumenon' (Kant, *Inaugural Dissertation*, §3, in *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 384). On the other hand, in the *Inaugural Dissertation* Kant had not yet made his later distinction between *understanding* and *reason* as separate faculties.

18. 'In this way, whatever in cognition is sensitive is dependent upon the special character of the subject in so far as the subject is capable of this or that modification by the presence of objects: these modifications may differ in different cases, according to the variations in the subjects. But whatever cognition is exempt from such subjective conditions relates only to the object. *It is thus clear that things which are thought sensitively are representations of things as they appear, while things which are intellectual are representations of things as they are* ' (Ibid., §4, 384). See also Lewis White Beck, *Studies in the Philosophy of Kant* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), 58.

scholars often characterize the *Dissertation* as in some sense 'Platonic', but if this is meant in any philosophically serious sense, it is scarcely defensible. This is because despite the lip service he pays to the mind's access to things as they are, the pre-critical Kant nonetheless already staunchly insisted on the unavailability of intellectual intuition as a form of human cognition.[19] We cannot have direct insight into an intelligible world beyond metaphysical concepts then, and those concepts moreover possess no intrinsic relationship to the only intuitions 'by which anything can be apprehended immediately or as singular', namely the deliverances of sensibility. What follows from this is that 'since, then,

> empirical principles are not found in metaphysics, the concepts met with in metaphysics are not to be sought in the senses but in the very nature of the pure understanding, and that not as innate concepts but as concepts abstracted from the laws inherent in the mind (by attending to its actions on the occasion of an experience), and therefore as acquired concepts. To this genus belong possibility, existence, necessity, substance, cause etc, together with their opposites or correlates. Such concepts never enter into any

19. 'There is (for man) no intuition of what belongs to the understanding, but only a symbolic cognition; and thinking is only possible for us by means of universal concepts in the abstract, not by means of a singular concept in the concrete. For all our intuition is bound to a certain principle of form, and it is only under this form that anything can be apprehended by the mind immediately or as singular, and not merely conceived discursively by means of general concepts. But this formal principle of our intuition (space and time) is the condition under which something can be the object of our senses. Accordingly, this formal principle, as the condition of sensitive cognition, is not a means to intellectual intuition. Moreover, since it is only through the senses that all the matter of our cognition is given, the noumenon as such cannot be conceived by means of representations drawn from sensations. Thus, the concept of the intelligible as such is devoid of all that is given in human intuition. The intuition, namely, of our mind is always passive. It is, accordingly, only possible in so far as it is possible for something to affect our sense' (Kant, *Inaugural Dissertation*, §10 389).

> sensory representations as parts, and thus they could not be abstracted from such a representation in any way at all.[20]

In rather the manner in which, in one aspect of Avicenna's theory of cognition, second intelligibles constitute the mind's natural processing of first intelligibles, Kant ascribes the concepts 'met with in metaphysics' to 'the laws inherent in the mind' rendered distinct to the knower 'by attending to the mind's actions on the occasion of an experience'. Yet the analogy rapidly breaks down when it becomes clear that Kant acknowledges no link of abstraction *from* sensible particulars, no rootedness therein, nor an Agent Intellect providing both immanent intelligibility to the sensible object and the corresponding universals to the knowing subject, let alone any doctrine of Platonic Forms. Unless, when we become aware through concepts of 'the laws inherent in the mind', we are having an intuition into the real structure of an intelligible world, that is, a direct cognition of a distinct intelligible object, what possible justification can we have for thinking that our concepts represent things as they are? It is in noting this incoherence that Beck has pointed out that the absence of intellectual intuition in the *Dissertation* is a lacuna the inconsistency of which Kant is precisely recognizing in the problem he is grappling with in his letter to Herz.[21] This

20. Ibid., *§8, 387-388*.

21. Lewis White Beck, 'Two Ways of Reading Kant's Letter to Herz: Comments on Carl', in *Kant's Transcendental Deductions: The Three Critiques and the Opus postumum*, ed. Eckart Förster (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 22. There is some disagreement amongst Kantian scholars concerning whether the 'objects' Kant refers to in his letter are appearances or noumena. Jennifer Mensch ('The Key to All Metaphysics: Kant's Letter to Herz, 1772', *Kantian Review* 12, no. 2 (2007): 109-27) has argued against Beck's conviction that it is the noumena that are concerned, which would mean that rather than precipitating the critical turn, as I believe it does, the famous letter to Herz in fact represents the critical turn *itself*. However, I find Beck's reasoning far more plausible; for one thing, if the central problem of the *CpR* had already been worked out in 1772, why would Kant need to spend another nine years working it out? Even more telling is Kant's portrayal of 'Plato's' position

problem forms the backdrop for one of even greater urgency for that of the letter to Herz, and for the subsequent formulation of the central problem of the *CpR*. This lies in the fact that when in the *Dissertation* Kant tells us 'that things which are thought sensitively are representations of things as they appear, while things which are intellectual are representations of things as they are' he scarcely musters any account of the interaction of the privileged intelligence, with its knowledge of things as they are, with the sensibility mired, as he portrays it, in its irredeemable subjectivity. Kant was happy for the intelligence to remain objective, and our knowledge of the actual constitution of individual objects in the sensible world to remain subjective.[22] Yet simultaneously, and despite his most earnest and most futile efforts to strictly quarantine them from one another (and indeed, as if quite despite himself), he *does* budget for *some form* of illumination of the nature of sensible objects by the intelligence.

(which we are about to see) as a mistaken approach to fundamentally the *same* problem that Kant is dealing with; but Plato is clearly not concerned with the relationship of ideas to mere subjective phenomena, since the temporal world also derives its weak mode of becoming-being as well as its knowability from the Forms. Most likely, this ambiguity of interpretation simply reflects Kant's own lack of clarity about the matter, given his almost total lack of appreciation of the question in his *Dissertation* and the aporia within which he had imprisoned himself because of the dogmatism of his sharp distinction there between a sensibility and intelligence that scarcely interact at all, despite the fact that Kant does nonetheless affirm that the intelligence knows *some* noumenal facts about the phenomenal world (see below). Of course, in Kant's rejection of the Platonic solution out of hand, the question posed in the letter leads instead, and in the fullness of time, not to a vindication of knowledge of things as they are, but to a subjective idealism in which Kant 'solves' the problem by claiming that *both* the concepts of the understanding and sensible intuitions are subjectively imposed.

22. As Guyer affirms, Kant in the *Dissertation* 'virtually ignores any possible role for the intellect in the cognition of objects of sensibility—though this is precisely the crucial function of the faculty of understanding in his later scheme. Instead, Kant chiefly considers an alleged use of the intellect for the cognition of objects which do not manifest themselves to sensibility in any form.' Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 16.

> The hinge, then, upon which the question about the principle of the form of the intelligible world turns is this: to explain how it is possible that a plurality of substances should be in mutual interaction with each other? … and in this way belong to the same whole, which is called a world.[23]

Here we witness, then, Kant's last vestiges of commitment to a recognisably *metaphysical* programme (before his redefinition of metaphysics in the *CpR*), that of seeking the unconditioned, the ultimate principle of unity of all being, which the later Kant would famously lambast as 'transcendental illusion':

> the unity in the conjunction of substances in the universe is a corollary of the dependence of all substances on one being. Hence, the form of the universe is testimony to the cause of its matter, and only the unique cause of all things taken together 'is the cause of its entirety,' and there is no architect of the world who is not also, at the same time, its Creator.[24]

Although the ontology put forward in the *Dissertation* provides no coherent account whatever of how this could be possible (as we have seen, many aspects of his subsequent critical project are already in place at this stage), the Kant of the *Dissertation* has nonetheless felt able to offer *some* noumenal knowledge of sensible objects.[25] He has himself told us that to the genus of concepts met with in metaphysics, which are not to be sought in the senses but in the nature of the understanding, 'belong possibility, existence, necessity, substance, cause

23. *Dissertation*, *§ 16, 401*.

24. Ibid., *§ 20, 403*.

25. I hope the gracious reader will permit my indulging in a colloquialism when I suggest that the early Kant's problem was simply that he wanted to both have his cake and to eat it, and that the later Kant was afflicted with a different version of quite the same desire.

etc, together with their opposites or correlates.' Yet here, he has just invoked the concepts of 'substance' 'dependence' and 'cause' to describe the true nature of the world and to identify the cause of the world, undeterred by the fact that he has scarcely drawn breath from assuring us that such concepts 'are not to be sought in the senses.'[26]

Given, thus, this background of evidently incurable confusion and self-contradiction, in posing the question, 'what is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call "representation" to the object?', at the outset of his 1772 letter to Herz, we are witnessing some of the first stirrings of epistemological misgivings that would give way—in the fullness of the ensuing years in which Kant toiled in the writing of the *CpR*—to the fully-fledged metaphysical subjectivism that represents the central and most distinctive doctrine of the critical philosophy. Kant expands on some of the considerations that have given his question such an urgency

> … our understanding, through its representations, is not the cause of the object … nor is the object the cause of the intellectual representations in the mind.[27] Therefore the pure concepts of the understanding must not be abstracted from pure sense perceptions, nor must they express the reception of representations through the senses; but though they must have their origin in the nature of the soul, they are neither caused by the object nor bring the object itself into being.[28]

Kant, indeed, seems to be becoming aware that, given the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of the *Dis-*

26. For a similar point, see Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, 17-18.

27. February 21, 1772 letter to Herz in *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence 1759-99*, 71.

28. Ibid., 72.

sertation, his placing of sensibility and the understanding in strict isolation from one another was not viable;

> In my dissertation … I had said: The sensuous representations present things as they appear, the intellectual representations present them as they are. But by what means are these things given to us, if not by the way in which they affect us? And if such intellectual representations depend on our inner activity, whence comes the agreement that they are supposed to have with objects—objects that are nevertheless not possibly produced thereby? And the axioms of pure reason concerning these objects—how do they agree with these objects, since the agreement has not been reached with the aid of experience?[29]

Kant's key unexamined assumptions thus far in the letter are that i) a 'representation' already intrinsically separated from 'objects' is the way that we come to know things, that ii) representation can only mean 'a way in which the subject is affected by the object',[30] and iii) the only conceivable mode of being affected by an object is by its empirical features. He moreover assumes that iv) the distinct knowability of both sensuous and intellectual representations *cannot possibly* derive from a common source in an intelligible world prior to both. On this final assumption, the ground for the interaction of the 'pure concepts of the understanding', and the 'axioms of pure reason' with Kant's strangely facilely depicted 'objects', flounders in the impossible void, an unfathomable mystery, just as does the manner in which these concepts are able even to enhance, let alone *constitute*, the intelligibility of these deliverances of sensation.

29. Ibid., 72.

30. Ibid., 71.

1.2.2 Plato and *Deus ex machina*?

But the most incautious of Kant's many indiscretions in his letter is certainly represented by his extraordinarily cavalier attack on Plato; it also justifies his rejection at iv) above, of the only real answer to his self imposed conundrum. We will now look at this, because it is immensely significant for an understanding of the inevitability—given the prior ideological commitments of Kant's empirical bias—of his 'Copernican Revolution':

> in the case of relationships involving qualities - as to how my understanding may form for itself concepts of things completely *a priori*, with which concepts the things must necessarily agree, and as to how my understanding may formulate *real* principles concerning the possibility of such concepts, with which principles experience must be in exact agreement and which nevertheless are independent of experience—this question, of how the faculty of the understanding achieves this conformity with the things themselves, is still left in a state of obscurity. Plato assumed a previous intuition of divinity as the primary source of the pure concepts of the understanding and of first principles …[31] But the *deus ex machina* is the greatest absurdity that one could hit upon in the determinations of the origin and validity of our knowledge. It has—besides its deceptive circle in the conclusion concerning our cognitions—also this additional disadvantage: it encourages all sorts of wild notions and every pious and speculative brainstorm.[32]

A few sentences on, after alluding to the view of Malebranche which Kant considered to be of a piece with that of Plato, he

31. Ibid., 72.

32. Ibid., 73.

describes this approach to the problem of the agreement of intelligible and sensible reality as that of 'hyperphysical influx'; a rather grotesque eighteenth-century way of saying that in it, the mind is influenced by some form of broad 'emanation' from beyond the physical world. Kant's Plato 'assumed' a *previous* intuition of divinity as the source of our intelligible concepts, whereas Malebranche 'believed in a still-continuing perennial intuition of this primary being'. We will courteously take leave of the Parisian priest in our discussion at this point, because the accuracy or otherwise of this depiction of his doctrine is not our concern here. Kant's account of Plato's epistemology and metaphysics, on the other hand, is a multifaceted misrepresentation; indeed, every single assertion he makes in his characterization of Plato's position is demonstrably inaccurate. What is this 'previous intuition of divinity' that Kant alleges, and that constitutes 'the primary source of the pure concepts of the understanding and of first principles', as opposed to a 'still-continuing' intuition? The depiction of the source of our knowledge of first principles and 'the pure concepts of the understanding' as an 'intuition of divinity' is unrecognizable in light of any of Plato's actual words in the dialogues. Most probably, Kant's lack of significant direct acquaintance with Plato's work[33] and the eighteenth-century tendency to identify the doctrine of Plato himself on the world of Forms with

33. '… Kant never read any original works of Plato or at least he read very little. Schelling claims that Kant read no original philosophical writings of the great philosophers and that his views on them are almost entirely founded on a metaphysics course in the spirit of Wolffianism that he followed as a university student. This may be an exaggeration but in any case scholars who have considered the matter have come to the conclusion that Kant indeed read little or maybe even no Plato and his knowledge of him is thus primarily second hand. We have not found any clear evidence to the contrary.' (Camilla Serck-Hanssen, and Eyjólfur K. Emilsson, 'Kant and Plato,' *Sats (Aarhus)* 5, no. 1 (2004): 71-82), 71. Kant was apparently undeterred by this however, and nonetheless, 'Of all named predecessors in *The Critique of Pure Reason* with the exception of Leibniz, Plato is actually the one who is most frequently mentioned and who gets the longest continuous discussion' (Ibid., 72).

the widespread placing of the Forms 'in the mind of God' by Middle Platonists are both factors here;[34] the ubiquitous Enlightenment tendency to feel justified in the creation and then knocking down of straw-man versions of traditional philosophies is also likely at play. The next distortion is the portrayal of this intuition as something that took place solely in the pre-incarnate state in which souls existed, prior to embodiment. It is, in Kant's depiction, a 'previous' rather than 'still-continuing' intuition, implying that souls newly floundering in space and time no longer have the possibility of some degree of direct access to the world of Forms, but must, in some inevitably feeble way, merely try to 'remember' it. This is a vicious, 'deceptive' circle for Kant, and indeed he is essentially accusing his 'Plato' of a kind of proto-Cartesian circle. This is because this weak form of indirect access to intelligible reality is meant to

34. Emilsson and Serck-Hanssen tell us '… the picture of Plato that emerges here [in Kant's treatment of Plato in the 1796 article 'On an Elevated Tone in Philosophy'] corresponds to Brucker's somewhat Neo-Platonic Plato who identifies the Ideas with divine thoughts, serving at the same time as the ultimate causes of things and the objects of ultimate knowledge.' Ibid., 73. Moreover, 'So what did Kant's Plato look like? When Kant was a young man, in 1742, the monumental *Historia critica philosophiae a mundi incunabulis ad nostram usque aetatem deductam* was published in Germany by the learned Wolffian scholar, Jakob Brucker. It appeared in several reprints and abridged versions during the next three decades. Kant certainly read Brucker's 100 page chapter on Plato to which he refers and which no doubt played an important role in shaping Kant's view on Plato. For instance … Kant's Plato has certain Neo-Platonic colours for which Brucker is the most likely source. For, interestingly, even if Brucker does distinguish between Plato and his followers in late antiquity, the so-called Neo-Platonists, he is still under the spell of the Neo-Platonic way of reading Plato so inherent in the tradition.' Ibid., 72. In fact, as Manfred Baum notes, Brucker's account was based on the Middle Platonist Alcinous' *Handbook*, not the later Neoplatonic tradition. See Manfred Baum, 'Plato and Kant: An Introduction' in *Brill's Companion to German Platonism*, ed. Alan Kim (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 109. Alcinous' actual characterization of the Forms is that they are the 'eternal and perfect thoughts of God'. See Alcinous, *The Handbook of Platonism*, translation and commentary by John Dillon (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993), 9.2.30, 164. In his commentary on the same section of *The Handbook*, Dillon notes that the relationship between the Forms and God is 'notoriously not present, or at least not spelled out, in Plato.' Ibid., 94.

ground the cognitions of our understanding by appeal to an intuition of divinity in a previous world, and in Kant's estimation the circle has been generated by the notion that it is only via those cognitions that we posit that intuition. The cognitions, with their weak epistemological efficacy, thus invoke the previous intuition as the guarantor of their validity, yet in order to be known, the intuition *requires* the cognitions that 'Plato' dogmatically insists require the previous, preincarnate intuition.

But this is not Plato's doctrine at all. Firstly, 'intuition' is not solely a 'previous' one, nor is it a single instance thereof. Intellectual intuition is an ability that any human being who has been able to discover the intelligible framework underlying and giving order to the world of sensible particulars must necessarily have employed in achieving this.[35] The great J.N. Findlay (1903-1987)—who is almost uniquely well-placed to comment due to his mastery of the thought of Kant and the entire German idealist tradition, his comprehensive and profoundly insightful knowledge of Plato and the Platonic tradition, and his own luminous philosophical acumen—speaks of

> that intuitive element essential in an eidetic philosophy: we must simply *see* that this or that really *is* a fundamental community running through a gamut of cases, and that there really *is* a difference of principle dividing this from that. The postulation of an Eidos is an hypothesis, a postulation of being, and the being it involves is of a kind to involve *non-sensuous intuition*. Modern philosophers who wish above

35. An obvious objection to this would be to ask how the person making this claim knows that he actually *has* uncovered an *objectively real* 'intelligible framework'. In fact, this is not really the clever 'knockdown' objection that it may seem to be to those schooled in modern, and indeed largely post-Kantian, philosophy. We will explore its solution, with the help of Lloyd Gerson, after we have discussed the meaning of (what can be validly called) 'intellectual intuition' in Plato.

> all things to dispense with non-sensuous intuitions have nothing to put in their place. They cannot find a basis for distinguishing between real affinities, real communities, and merely conventional, verbal ones, nor between deep-cutting differences and merely trivial, external ones: we can find trivial resemblances and artificial distinctions to justify any and every alignment of thought-material. Platonism holds that there are discernible rifts and communities in all that we can think of, and that it is all-important and not arbitrary to say just where they lie.[36]

'Seeing' the one over the many is an 'intuition', and not a discursive process. It is the direct relation of the knowing subject, with its *capacity* for discrimination, to a distinct intentional object in so far as this latter reveals, at once and without mediation, that its determinacy has arisen from the distinctness of the ontological ground that has made that intuitive cognition possible, to wit, the Form or Forms, which are both the causes of this privileged variety of intentional object,[37] and of the sensible images

36. J.N. Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 156. See also one of Findlay's spiritual successors, Lloyd Gerson in his *Platonism and Naturalism*, 'Far from thinking that all knowledge is representational, when Plato considers ἐπιστήμη, he denies that it is representational altogether. This is at least part of the reason why, in the so-called affinity argument, Socrates argues that in order for us to have knowledge of Forms, our souls must be more like the immaterial objects of knowledge than any body' (112). He has already explained that 'The knowledge of the Form … cannot be propositional … It is best described as mental seeing, analogous to the mental seeing achieved when one, for example, sees some pattern and so is able to continue it. (Ibid.).

37. Lloyd Gerson expresses this distinction between intentional object and Form with great nuance and precision, and in the process decisively clears up an enduring misunderstanding about Plato's doctrine: 'It is easy to conflate the denial of the hypostatization of the objects of universal thinking with a denial of the existence of separate entities whose nature the Form's name names. It is perhaps understandable that from an argument concluding that universals should not be hypostatized, one can conclude further that Forms do not exist. From a Platonic perspective, however, this would be a non sequitur. Stated

of the instantial world. These are the true 'objects' by which we are affected, both in thought and, though more faintly, in distinct sensation; their 'agreement', the gnosis of whose mystery Kant so craves, is not so mysterious after all: it is guaranteed by the mutual derivation of instantiated particulars and concepts from the Forms. This distinctness of ones over manys, stratified with respect to priority and posteriority, superordination and subordination, indeed *imposes* itself upon us at a particular moment in our epistemological progression; it unfolds before the mind the *essential* natures of things, in contradistinction to the 'trivial resemblances and artificial distinctions' from which modern philosophers are on the whole unable to escape. Combined with the discursive procedure of dialectic when it considers a whole world of 'ones over the many' standing in relations to one another, these intuitions of the one over the many reveal 'principles of unity' of ever greater generality and ontological priority, such that the stage becomes set for the 'henological ascent'. This is the ascension in contemplation and inward experience through the levels of being representing the *primary* 'principles of unity', to the Good[38] that is also the

otherwise, if I encounter Forms in a cognitive modality, namely, universally, it does not follow from a denial that the intentional object of thinking does not exist on its own that the Form does not exist on its own. Such a result would follow only if there was no real distinction between the Form and the intentional object. The closest Platonic term to indicate such an intentional object is νόημα and Plato says as clearly as possible in his *Parmenides*, that Forms are not νοήματα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, that is, the intentional objects that result from the activity of thinking. *The principal justification for the real distinction is that no intentional object can do the job that Forms are postulated to do, namely, explain identity in difference or the possibility of predication.* The universality drops out of the ontological account of how two or more numerically distinct things can be the same' (*Platonism and Naturalism*, 81); the emphasis is mine.

38. Commenting on *Republic.* 511B6-7, Gerson tells us 'it is quite explicit that the Forms are deduced from the first principle. I take this to imply that there is no ἐπιστήμη [scientific knowledge] of the Forms without ascending to the Good and then descending to the Forms themselves. This requirement itself follows from sec. 5.1., 7 [In Gerson's book, which states 'The Idea of the Good is the principle of the existence and essence … of Forms (509B9-10)']. Deductions

One, the knowledge of which latter is the necessary condition for attaining to the *fullness* of knowledge of the Forms, that one might say had at the beginning of the ascent been known by their sheer distinct *existences*, but whose *essences* had not yet come into total relief. Yet this ascent is not possible for everyone, requiring, rather, a spiritual preparedness which possesses its own requirements and procedure. The incorporeal knowing subject possesses by nature an intrinsic affinity with the intelligible world, and the prospect of being flooded by its light is thus a real one (at least, many individuals possess this).[39] The *possibility* of an immediate and direct cognition ('intellectual intuition') of the existence, and something of the nature of Forms (at the very least, adequate to ground and illuminate our cognitions), is thus available to the human soul, exactly because it is of its nature continuous with and thus potentially in direct contact with the intelligible world. In the *Phaedrus* we read:

> Now, as we have said, every human soul has, by reason of her nature, had contemplation of true being … but to be put in mind thereof by things here is not easy for every soul.[40]

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within the intelligible world depend upon internal relatedness and, ultimately, on the integrative unity of the parts of being proceeding from the Good' (*Platonism and Naturalism*, 122.n.9).

39. Plato in his magnificent (and authentic) Seventh Letter: '*natural intelligence and a good memory are equally powerless to aid the man who has not an inborn affinity with the subject*. Without such endowments there is of course not the slightest possibility … The study of virtue and vice must be accompanied by an inquiry into what is false and true of existence in general and must be carried out by constant practice throughout a long period … Hardly after practicing detailed comparisons of names and definitions and visual and other sense perceptions, after scrutinizing them in benevolent disputation by the use of question and answer without jealousy, at last in a flash understanding of each blazes up, and the mind, as it exerts all its powers to the limit of human capacity, is flooded with light' (344a-c, translated by L.A. Post).

40. *Phaedrus*, 250a, translated by R. Hackforth. This and subsequent references to Plato's works are from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntingdon Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).

Kant would appear to be entirely unaware of the fact that unlike in his own doctrine, the knowing subject in Plato is a dynamic being, not a neat and static list of cognitive apparatuses. Embodiment in the world has radically impeded our ability to know things as they are, and this is exactly because the distinct natures, the '*ones over manys*' that render the world intelligible, cannot be consistently construed as objects of the five senses, such that physical individuation in a sensible world, although it *supervenes* on the intelligible world, has deprived us of the directness of our relation to things as they really are.[41] Indeed, some degree of this knowledge is still attainable, but only if the knowing subject can embark upon the path of 'purification', so that the veil cast by the soul's captivity in the corporeal world might be rent asunder. Enter Socrates:[42]

> Do we recognize such a thing as absolute uprightness? … And absolute beauty and goodness too? … Have you ever seen any of these things with your eyes? … have you ever apprehended them with any other bodily sense? By 'them' I mean not only absolute tallness or

41. Findlay is predictably illuminating on a closely related point that will help us to better understand this, about the epistemological relationship between the sensible and the intelligible: '… the whole thrust of Platonism … was to *deny* that there was anything genuinely seizable and knowable, or anything truly causative and explanatory, in the flowing realm of particular things and matters of fact as such: what was seizable, what was knowable, what could truly imprint itself on and maintain itself in flux, and give purchase to our recognition, was always an Eidos, a nature or constitutive pattern, and it was only because our minds realized or maintained a corresponding cognitive pattern that they could understand or know anything, even concerning the realm of flux. And this Eidos always had the firmness, the immunity from change, which its embodiments could never have, and it was therefore Eide, and only Eide, that could be identified on many occasions and by many individual thinkers, and identified in acts that themselves embodied unchanging, repeatable patterns of understanding and insight.'

42. I have omitted the rather agreeable and timid answers given in this section of the specific dialogue concerned, in order to be able to present a more continuous philosophical chain of thought.

health or strength, but *the real nature of any given thing — what it actually is* … Don't you think that the person who is likely to succeed in this attempt most perfectly is the one who approaches each object, so far as possible, with the unaided intellect … the man who pursues the truth by applying his *pure and unadulterated thought to the pure and unadulterated object … ? So long as we keep to the body and our soul is contaminated with this imperfection, there is no chance of our ever attaining satisfactorily to our object, which we assert to be truth* … the body fills us with innumerable distractions … loves and desires and all sorts of fancies and a great deal of nonsense … if we do obtain any leisure from the body's claims and turn to some line of inquiry, the body intrudes once more into our investigations, interrupting, disturbing, distracting, and preventing us from getting a glimpse of the truth. *We are in fact convinced that if we are ever to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul itself.* It seems, to judge from the argument, that the wisdom which we desire and upon which we profess to have our hearts set will be attainable only when we are dead, and not in our lifetime … It seems that *so long as we are alive, we shall continue closest to knowledge if we avoid as much as we can all contact and association with the body*, except when they are absolutely necessary, and instead of allowing ourselves to become infected with its nature, purify ourselves from it until God himself gives us deliverance … *purification … consists in separating the soul as much as possible from the body, and accustoming it to withdraw from all contact with the body and concentrate itself by itself* … the desire to free the soul is found chiefly, or rather only, in the true philosopher. In fact the philosopher's occupation consists precisely in the freeing and separation of soul

> from body … *true philosophers make dying their profession* …[43]

The doctrine of recollection is not so much an account of the metaphysical genesis of our concepts, as it is an account of the natural potential of the human knowing subject to transcend the cognition of concepts and sensible impressions in order to uncover the intelligible framework that those concepts and impressions can only deficiently imitate, an intelligible framework that nonetheless must have been in place for any distinct cognition whatever, internal or external, to have in the first instance been possible at all. In the argument of *Phaedo* 72e3-78b3, Plato famously explains the concept of recollection by comparing 'absolute equality' with instances of equality of various types. Now, the strictly *sensible* features of the object show no sign of 'equality' (as Socrates asked above, 'Have you ever seen any of these things with your eyes?'). What is more, predicating equality of two sensible substrata involves a *judgement* about *relations* that the two objects stand in with respect to one another. Yet 'equality' must exist as an *a priori* criterion, *prior*, indeed, to any individual cognition thereof, because it is not possible to ground our predication of equality in the purely sensible or quantitative features of the substrata, due

43. *Phaedo* 65d-67e, translated by Hugh Tredennick. The emphases are, of course, mine. It should be noted that these passages serve as a propaedeutic to the exposition of the doctrine of recollection, also in the *Phaedo*, which we will discuss below. It is no accident then that Findlay relates the deathlessness sought in this philosophical dying, to recollection: 'What the doctrine of reminiscence at least shows … is that we as thinkers have access to a world of unchanging Meanings, which at least suggests that, though inexpugnably instantial even in our acts of thought, we in some degree rise above such instantiality and achieve a certain community with "deathlessness" in such acts of thinking' (Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines*, 126-127). See also Lloyd P. Gerson, without doubt one of the very greatest of contemporary Platonists, in his *Platonism and Naturalism: The Possibility of Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), 72n.117: 'knowledge requires separation from the body because *the objects of knowledge are separate from the bodily*. Insofar as we are embodied, the body is an impediment to this knowledge.'

to the fact that strictly with respect to themselves, they simply evince no sign of 'equality' whatever. They can only in some sense 'participate' in equality (and absolute beauty, goodness, uprightness, holiness,[44] the list is endless) because it is a genuinely *prior* criterion. With respect to themselves, they can only even be 'deficient' instances of Equality, which has now richly merited its capital letter. Another aspect of this deficiency has been masterfully evidenced by Gerson:

> … equal sticks and stones may be said to be equal at the same time that it is recognized that their equality is deficient equality. The deficiency resides in the fact that any account (λόγος) of the attribute in them in virtue of which the predication is made will be compromised because it must include information that would necessarily be in the account of a contrary predicate. For example, in giving an account of the equality of two or more equal things, I must necessarily include the quantity or magnitude of each sufficient to make it equal to the other(s). But this quantity or magnitude would necessarily be included in an account of why one or the other thing was unequal to any other … The concept of equality only describes our thinking and in fact entails nothing about the objects. As the argument shows, the judgement of deficient equality is a very particular sort of judgement, one which could not be made unless one already knew that in relation to which the deficient equals fall short. They are not equal and then, independently, deficient. They are deficiently equal.[45]

Although equality is never inequality, the same instantial entity may very well be both equal and unequal. Absolute equality, thus, can never become adequately manifest within one of its

44. The examples given at *Phaedo* 75d.

45. *Platonism and Naturalism*, 109.

instances; and this concludes our exposition of Kant's letter to Herz. The reader will scarcely wish to blame us for fleeing so far from the drudgeries of the transcendental philosophy, indeed to the verdant pastures of a truly transcendent philosophy like that of Plato, but this was of course all merely in aid of correcting Kant's misrepresentations of the latter, and here are our results:

Plato's 'previous intuition of divinity as the primary source of the pure concepts of the understanding and of first principles' is not 'previous' and nor is it of 'divinity'. Rather, it is the recollective, ongoing intellectual intuition of the intelligible world of the Forms —with which the soul possesses an ontological affinity that it may rescue from the bonds of corporeality via purification, and thus recover—that constitutes the necessary, underlying framework making distinct cognition possible, a framework distinct from our concepts and not always attained by them. This is no *deus ex machina* but a *continuous* chain of henological ascent, capable of transcending immanent concepts (just as the purified soul transcends the entrapped soul) while providing the only possible warrant for the use of those concepts, via intellectual intuitions of the Forms that on closer examination are presupposed by any intellectual endeavour whatever, including, of course, Kant's procedure of 'critique'. Nowhere is there any sign of a god of the gaps, nor of a circle, for the recollective intellectual intuition *imposes* itself upon us as the necessary guarantor of the possibility *of all discursive thought*, and then rather than dogmatically positing it, as Kant alleges, *uncovers* an ontological ground (the Forms). Kant, on the other hand, will shortly invoke an *abyssus ex machina* to steal away the possibility of true knowledge, his unknowable noumenal world that somehow manages to be so well-known to us that we can know that it *causes* affections in us despite possessing, by his own definition, no relationship to the forms of our cognitive apparatuses whatever (including no relation to the 'causality' derived from the Understanding). This is the absolute unconditioned nothing by which Kant tries and fails

to evade charges of idealism after his critical turn. We will now briefly turn, for our own part, to a consideration of the main results of the *CpR*, before we continue with our exposition of the metacritical problem.

1.2.3 The doctrine of the *CpR*

It is a commonplace that the most fundamental question at the heart of the problematic of Kant's philosophy, is that of the limits of knowledge. In the first critique, the *Critique of Pure Reason,* he seeks to determine the nature and prospects of 'theoretical' reason, which he opposes to the 'practical' reason, that he would later treat in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The distinction between theoretical and practical reason originates with Aristotle,[46] and is preserved in both Arabic philosophy and Latin philosophy in the Middle Ages. In these philosophies, theoretical reason is that which seeks to attain the truth of how things *are*, whereas practical reason treats human action, specifically how it *should be*. The broadly Aristotelian conception of theoretical reason takes as its starting point self-evident first principles, both of conception and assent, and sense experience, to which it applies the tools of syllogistic logic in order to provide 'demonstrations' of conclusions to particular philosophical questions yielded and seen to have been rendered certain and indubitable by the application of this method. On this particular traditional model, theoretical reason in metaphysics, mathematics and physics can yield demonstrative, necessary results, whereas practical reason, in specific applications of ethics, law, politics and the like, in concerning matters which 'could have been different', is only able

46. For a good introduction to some of the many interpretive complexities implied by Aristotle's account of the relationship between practical and theoretical knowledge, which it has not been within the scope of this paper to explore, see James V. Allen, 'Practical and Theoretical Knowledge in Aristotle', in Devin Henry and Karen Margrethe Nielsen, ed., *Bridging the Gap Between Aristotle's Science and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

to yield contingent truths — that is, truths which it is not contradictory to deny, and thus, unlike necessary truths, are in principle revisable.

As is his wont, Kant substantially upturns this traditional Aristotelian understanding. For Kant after his critical turn, 'theoretical' metaphysics is no longer able to yield necessary truths about its conclusions. It can no longer provide demonstrations of special metaphysical questions like those of the existence of God and the nature of the soul (which become merely practical questions), nor a general metaphysical account of the intelligible structure of reality. Kant brands 'dogmatic' those metaphysicians who reach their conclusions about putative non-sensory realities without first examining the legitimacy of the claim that human reason is able to justifiably reach those conclusions. Setting out to subject reason to just this critique, Kant finds that traditional metaphysicians are guilty of merely playing with pure concepts, a quite sterile activity, dismally unfitted to produce real knowledge.

The changes wrought by Kant are thus dramatic; he has discounted traditional metaphysics, which for most of two thousand years had been viewed not merely as a 'genuine' science, but as the supreme and universal science, from which all of the special sciences derive their first principles. Yet Kant believes that his revolutionary conclusions are justified precisely by the very examination of human cognition that he has accused traditional 'dogmatic' metaphysicians of having failed to carry out. When the structure of human cognition is examined, it becomes evident that it is unable to reach the lofty goals that it cannot help but set itself.

This is most fundamentally because his examination of reason has shown him that in physics and mathematics, the obtainment of 'synthetic *a priori*' truths is possible, whereas in traditional metaphysics, this is impossible. Famously for Kant, synthetic *a priori* truths constitute the only propositions in the sciences genuinely capable of furthering our knowledge. They combine *a priori* elements that are universal and necessary,

while crucially also providing an *empirical expansion* of our knowledge. *A priori* concepts and intuitions provide necessity and universality, while observation of the world provides the contingent, empirical element rendered *intelligible* by the *a priori* forms.

For example, it is the existence of the synthetic *a priori* which putatively accounts for our ability to predict the occurrence of certain natural phenomena with great accuracy. Although we have not yet witnessed a particular solar eclipse, we possess mathematical and further conceptual apparatuses that enable us to predict the precise time at which this phenomenon will become manifest, and our confidence in the suitability to truth of this fusion of conceptual and empirical elements, is only borne out when we do in fact *experience* the solar eclipse taking place, at the exact time predicted via this special employment of our *non-empirical* conceptual apparatuses. This and other similar examples seem to confirm the real applicability of concepts to sense experience, in which a combination of the *a priori*, universal and conceptual, and the synthetic, empirical and observable is able to genuinely increase our knowledge of what takes place in the natural world.

For the Kant of the *CpR*, 'knowledge' can only obtain when two faculties of human cognition, the understanding (which yields concepts) and sensibility (which involves 'intuitions' of time and space), come together to produce 'experience'.[47] Yet concepts and intuitions do not reveal things-in-themselves. The Kant of the *CpR* has resolved the conundrum concerning their agreement that had so troubled him in 1772; concepts and intuitions agree because they are *both* subjective impositions, united in the equally subjective 'transcendental unity of apperception'. The intuitions of time and space are projected upon, and as it were 'cover over', a world whose true nature we can never know, exactly because time and space have veiled that true nature, rather than in any sense 'representing' it. The

47. Kant introduces this key assumption at *CpR* A50/B74-A52/B76.

other necessary component of cognition, the pure concepts of the understanding or Categories, such as unity, causality, and subsistence, are purely mental; they are not abstracted from particulars as both the Aristotelian construction of the Categories as well as the transcendentals were thought to be by Medieval scholastic philosophers,[48] nor do they constitute a

48. In a manner characteristic of his often cursory and hastily dismissive appraisal of traditional metaphysics, Kant acknowledges the existence of (one basic account of) the Medieval 'transcendentals', as well as the pertinence of this field of study to his own depiction of the *a priori* framework of knowledge. 'But there is yet another chapter in the transcendental philosophy of the ancients that contains pure concepts of the understanding that, although they are not reckoned amongst the categories, nevertheless according to them should also count as *a priori* concepts of objects … These are expounded in the proposition, so famous amongst the scholastics ['Every being is one, true and good]. Now although the use of this principle for inferences has turned out to be very meagre (they have yielded merely tautological propositions), so that in modern times it has been customary to grant it a place in metaphysics almost solely by courtesy, nevertheless that which has sustained itself so long, no matter how empty is seems, always deserves an investigation of its origin, and justifies the conjecture that it must have its background in some rule of understanding, which, as so often happens, has merely been falsely interpreted. These supposedly transcendental predicates of things are nothing other than logical requisites and criteria of all cognition of things in general, and ground it in the categories of quantity, namely, the categories of unity, plurality, and totality; yet these categories must really have been taken as material, as belonging to the possibility of things itself, when in fact they should have been used in a merely formal sense, as belonging to the logical requirements for every cognition; thus these criteria were carelessly made into properties of things in themselves' (B114). The reader may wish to consult Kant's full attempt to reduce the Medieval transcendentals to members of his category of quantity in the original ((B113-116). Here, as so often proves the case where Kant's pronouncements on traditional metaphysics are concerned, his claim that the application of the transcendentals has only ever yielded tautological propositions merely amounts to another of the self-fulfilling prophecies ever begotten by the tangled web of dogmatic assumptions that lie at the foundation of his 'critical' philosophy. As the foremost contemporary scholar of the Medieval transcendentals Jan Aertsen has noted, 'Kant criticized "the transcendental philosophy of the ancients" by suggesting that the famous scholastic thesis: "*quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum*" is "tautological". But this suggestion is wrong. Scholastic authors again and again emphasize that the *communia* are not synonyms and all account for the identity and difference of transcendental terms according to the model of the *proprium* in the Porphyrian order of the predicables. They choose this model, because it

prior framework of intelligible reality, as we have seen is the case in Plato. For Kant, the Categories render intelligible the deliverances of sensible intuitions, but since the Categories can only be made to apply to the only matter of cognition available to us, namely the sensation which is formally *constituted* by the forms of time and space (which are entirely subjective), and moreover because the Categories are rooted in nothing beyond their immanent manifestations in minds, they too are entirely subjective.

That which cannot be 'experienced', that is, via the synthesis of concept and intuition, cannot be known to be true at all. Now, since mathematics and physics do not purport to go beyond this definition of experience, they are genuine sciences that truly extend our knowledge. Mathematics and physics do thus yield 'knowledge', but only knowledge of appearances. Metaphysics, on the other hand, claims to offer us knowledge of non-sensible realities such as the soul, God, and the general structure of intelligible reality, which for Kant can be the objects of no possible experience. This is because the concepts of the understanding pertain to objects in general, not

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determines the structure of a *scientia* : every science seeks the properties that belong *per se* to its subject.' Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 659. Indeed, in showing the multifarious and metaphysically fructuous applications of the transcendentals throughout the history of philosophy, Aertsen's entire study provides evidence against Kant's customarily cavalier disparaging of this key area of traditional metaphysics. See also our full critical appraisal of this interesting but profoundly flawed attempt by Kant, in our forthcoming *Time, Space and the Transcendentals: Human 'Being' at the Isthmus of Physics and Metaphysics* (Tabah). In *Things as They Are: Nafs al-Amr and the Metaphysical Foundations of Objective Truth*, I have provided the foundations for an account of the hierarchical framework within which the transcendentals (whose scope we expand to encompass the *umūr 'āmma* amongst other intelligible entities), in terms of their subordination to superordinate 'metaprinciples', uncover the degrees of participation of individuated essences in the underlying structure of the intelligible world, through their application to sensible beings in terms of the intuition of their 'principles of unity' (see particularly 118-136; see also 39-52 for my treatment of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in the same work).

to any distinct object *per se,* and their *independent* employment cannot thus produce knowledge of any distinct entity. Of course, science uses concepts in order to illuminate the nature of particulars, not merely to confine itself within the realm of pure concepts. This is why these concepts must be fused with intuitions in order to provide genuine, non-trivial truths, again, what Kant calls 'synthetic *a priori*' truths. When traditional 'dogmatic' metaphysicians claim to use concepts alone to reach conclusions about, for example, the existence of God, they are really merely playing with those concepts, which because not applied to actual (sensible) objects, can never yield knowledge of real objects. Kant has a ready faculty dedicated to the production of such fancies of 'transcendental illusion',[49] and this is 'reason'. Reason's 'ideas of pure reason' are concepts that unlike the Categories of the understanding, are not employed in the constitution, alongside sensible intuitions, of objects.[50] Instead, they purport to depict noumenal realities in general and in themselves, but this is really a mere 'grasping amongst concepts', concepts that arise from nothing beyond themselves, and that are rooted in nothing in reality.[51] Reason for Kant is

49. '…transcendental illusion, which influences principles whose use is not ever meant for experience, since in that case we would at least have a touchstone for their correctness, but which instead, contrary to all the warnings of criticism, carries us away beyond the empirical use of the categories, and holds out to us the semblance of extending the pure understanding. We will call the principles whose application stays wholly and completely within the limits of possible experience immanent, but those that would fly beyond these boundaries transcendent principles.' *CpR* A 296.

50. 'A concept made up of notions, which goes beyond the possibility of experience, is an idea or a concept of reason.' Ibid., B 377

51. Plato is again a target here, epitomizing in his work the misguided attempt to use concepts beyond their proper application in intuitions: 'Plato made use of the expression idea in such a way that we can readily see that he understood by it something that not only could never be borrowed from the senses, but that even goes far beyond the concepts of the understanding (with which Aristotle occupied himself), since nothing encountered in experience could ever be congruent to it. Ideas for him are archetypes of things themselves, and not, like the categories, merely the key to possible experiences. In his opinion they flowed

incorrigibly prone to seek after a chimera; it cannot but seek for the unconditioned, and this is a 'natural and unavoidable illusion which itself rests on subjective principles and passes them off as objective.'[52]

> Reason, in inferring, seeks to bring the greatest manifold of cognition of the understanding to the smallest number of principles (universal conditions), and thereby to effect the highest unity of that manifold.[53]

Of course, with his immense powers, Kant seems to have been able to combat this ineluctable and primitive inclination to unify, in order to carry out his *Critique* (by an act of will?).

It has often been commented, quite justly in our opinion, that Kant's separation of the Understanding and Reason (which he had not yet presumed to undertake in the *Inaugural Dissertation*) is quite lacking in serious philosophical justification. It seems rather to be a requirement of the internal coherence of his project, given his own assumptions about his contrast between the *legitimate* use of concepts (in fusion with intuitions) and their illegitimate use (that is, their independent use). But which concepts, one wonders, is Kant employing to

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from the highest reason, through which human reason partakes in them; our reason, however, now no longer finds itself in its original state, but must call back with toil the old, now very obscure ideas through a recollection (which is called philosophy).' (*CpR* B 370). Kant then notes, without excessive modesty 'we understand him even better than he understood himself.'

52. Ibid., A 298.

53. Ibid., A 305. Also, due to the motive force yielding transcendental illusion 'there will be syllogisms containing no empirical premises, by means of which we can infer from something with which we are acquainted to something of which we have no concept, and yet to which we nevertheless, by an unavoidable illusion, give objective reality.' (A 339, B 397). Now '… something of which we have no concept, and yet to which we nevertheless, by an unavoidable illusion, give objective reality': could not some of Kant's critical first assumptions (see also the note directly below), fall quite comfortably under this rubric? 'The understanding and the sensibility are separate faculties and they are the *sine qua non* of genuine knowledge', for example?

carry out his *Critique*? Neither kind is eligible; when Kant critiques reason, he is certainly not applying concepts to sensible intuitions; and on the other hand, he is scarcely going to admit to have been indulging in the 'illegitimate' *constitutive* use of concepts; but more on this later.[54]

These assumptions are in turn only justified by Kant's prior assumptions about the radical separation of sensibility and understanding, the effective priority of the intuitions of sensibility in providing singular representations (the *a priori* forms of sensibility, time and space) which are in direct inform-

54. Granted, Kant does admit of a certain beneficial, 'regulative' use of the concepts of reason, in that it may 'serve the understanding as a canon for its extended and self-consistent use, through which it cognizes no more than it would cognize through its concepts, yet in this cognition it will be guided better and further' (see A 329, B 386 and then Kant's appendix to the *Transcendental Dialectic*, 'On the regulative use of the ideas of pure reason', from A 643/B 672 onwards: 'Everything grounded in the nature of our powers must be purposive and consistent with their correct use, if we can guard against a certain misunderstanding and find out their proper direction. Thus the transcendental ideas too will presumably have a good and *consequently immanent* use, even though, if their significance is misunderstood and they are taken for concepts of real things, they can be transcendent in their application and for that very reason deceptive'). Kant does not, of course, claim to be using pure ideas of reason in order to *establish* his critical procedure, but he does claim that reason provides the understanding with the systematic unity enabling it to extend 'over all possible empirical cognition of objects', although not, of course, as a constitutive principle but merely as a regulative principle (see A 680/B 708). It is interesting to note that Kant's conclusions about 'immanent' objects can certainly not themselves be construed as merely immanent. Take the first assumptions of the critique, like, again, 'the understanding and the sensibility are separate faculties', 'they are the *sine qua non* of real knowledge', 'we have no faculty of intellectual intuition', 'the categories cannot exist extramentally, embedded in things-in-themselves', 'time and space are mind-dependent', 'the ideas of pure reason intrinsically yield transcendental illusion' etc. These are not immanent objects, but intelligible judgements that purport (while obfuscating the question of whether they do so purport) to depict things as they really are, all the while possessing no corresponding 'objects' in Kant's favoured fusion of intuition and concept. Of course, much more needs to be said about Kant's fascinating 'Transcendental Dialectic', and that section of the *CpR* will be examined more comprehensively in our forthcoming *Time, Space and the Transcendentals: Human 'Being' at the Isthmus of Physics and Metaphysics* (Tabah).

ing relation to the matter of sensibility, sensation (intuition 'is immediately related to the object and is singular'),[55] and although the 'object' constituted by our faculties in Kant cannot be actualized, and is indeed 'blind' without also being informed by the concepts of the understanding, these concepts of the understanding cannot provide the singular framework for empirical objects that time and space do, but are of merely 'general' application with respect to themselves.

Indeed, as we have already noted, there is for Kant no faculty of 'intellectual' intuition that would allow us to directly cognize non-sensory realities, or any putative intelligible world rooting our categories and ideas of reason. Such a faculty, Kant tells us, 'lies absolutely outside of our faculty of cognition';[56] a non-sensible intuition is something 'the possibility of which we cannot in the least represent';[57] but he offers precious little more in the way of warrant for banishing intellectual intuition from the bounds of real possibility; just as little, indeed, as he had offered in his, granted, considerably more modest *Dissertation*.[58]

55. Ibid., B 377. Another of Kant's incoherences; the object is only actualized by being constituted by intuitions *and* concepts, so what is 'the object' that intuition, putatively 'on its own', is immediately related to in a singular representation?

56. Ibid., B 309.

57. Ibid., B 312.

58. Indeed, the dogmatic ruling out of intellectual intuition constituted one of the major dissatisfactions, of which the newly appearing 'German Idealist' thinkers complained. As Pippin notes, 'intellectual intuition … is just what Fichte, Schelling, and in some ways Novalis, in some different way Hegel, insisted we *did* indeed have. One strain in such an emerging school of thought (tied especially to Fichte) had it that Kant himself had to be availing himself of some such potency, given that his own determination of the forms of experience amounted to an *a priori* determination of content, and even that the apperceptive character of experience, the way we must be said to be in some self-relation in all relation to objects, was already a manifestation of such an unusual faculty (by Kant's own theory, such apperceptive activity was neither a judgement nor a manifestation of inner sense, so it seemed already close to a form of "intellectual intuition")' (Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity*, 35). We have already seen W.H. Walsh coming to a similar conclusion.

In his 'critical' analysis of the possibilities of human cognition, then, Kant believes that he has conclusively shown, so that it is 'established forever', that synthetic *a priori* truths are possible in physics and mathematics, but impossible in metaphysics. It is this revolutionary conclusion that justifies Kant in thinking he has forever changed the course of philosophy. Indeed, he has; but it is unfortunate that this is not because his philosophy is true.

2.1
APPROACHES TO THE METACRITICAL PROBLEM: KANT'S CONTEMPORARIES, HEGEL, AND SOME CONTEMPORARY COMMENTATORS.

As we have already had occasion to point out, many of the most prominent Kant scholars of the twentieth century have raised the problem of the 'possibility' of the critical philosophy. Names like Henry E. Allison, Paul Guyer, Robert Pippin, W.H. Walsh and Lewis White Beck are not insignificant ones in the world of Kant exegesis, and although they have each alluded to the seriousness and foundational nature of this problem,[59] it remains a somewhat neglected area—perhaps because of what Pippin calls its 'intractability'—still lacking a single large-scale treatment.

Long before we enter the era of the modern commentators on the first critique, however, the earliest objections to Kant's system have often pointed out the inconsistencies entailed by Kant's very *assumption* that the critique of reason is itself possible. While it is the supposedly 'dogmatic' metaphysicians (the stated targets of the first critique) who are purported to have failed to examine their own apparatuses of cognition in order to determine whether they are indeed capable of answering the questions that they have been helplessly led by 'reason' to set for themselves, Kant does not seem to have acknowledged the necessity of accounting *for how he has himself arrived at his most basic critical assumptions*. The problem of the possibility of Kant's philosophy, then, is far from a new one; it began to be asked within Kant's own lifetime, by thinkers like Hamann, Schulze, Platner and Fichte.[60] This early stream of the recep-

59. Aside from such allusions already referenced elsewhere in this paper, see for example, Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 331, and Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, 419-21.

60. On the 'metacritical' approaches of these earlier thinkers, I have made extensive use of Frederick C. Beiser's now standard *The Fate of Reason: German Philoso-*

tion of Kant then culminates in the work of a certain Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

2.1.1 Hamann on Kantian dualisms

According to Frederick Beiser, 'Hamann's "Metakritik" has a strong claim to be the starting point of post-Kantian philosophy.'[61] Hamann may have been the first person to read the *Critique of Pure Reason* after Kant,[62] and quickly seeing the necessity that the process of critique be applied to Kant's critical project as well, immediately denounced Kant's abstraction of reason from 'its necessary embodiment in language, tradition, and experience.'[63] The idea that a distinct and free-standing 'faculty' of reason could pronounce on the nature of things from its own independent, isolated vantage point was, for Hamann, simply absurd. As Beiser characterizes his position, for Hamann reason 'is not a faculty at all. Rather, reason is only a function, a specific way of thinking and acting in a specific cultural and linguistic context.'[64] Hamaan indeed takes issue with other of Kant's reifications of what are really elements of a single human consciousness;[65] for example, his concretization of the sensibility and understanding as really

phy from Kant to Fichte (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). For a more extended treatment of Hamann in particular, which deals extensively with his *Metakritik*, see Robert Alan Sparling, *Johann Georg Hamann and the Enlightenment Project* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011). For Fichte's particular approach to the broadest construal of the problem (although pursued in quite a different manner to the approach that unifies the treatments presented in this paper), see Günter Zöller, 'From Critique to Metacritique: Fichte's Transformation of Kant's Transcendental Idealism' in Sally Sedgwick (ed.), *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

61. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, 39.
62. Ibid., 38.
63. Ibid., 39.
64. Ibid., 39.
65. See Sparling, *Johann Georg Hamann and the Enlightenment Project*, 70.

distinct faculties; what, after all, given this separateness, allows them to interact and cooperate in the production of knowledge? Kant offers no adequate answer.[66] Hamann, then, seems to be the first thinker to question the possibility of Kant's critical project. As Beiser tell us, 'his remarks upon Kant's methodology are significant since they reveal his reaction to the implicit—and often ignored—meta-critical theory behind the *Kritik*.'[67] Beiser's words are telling. He describes the first statement of a view that would become effectively unanimous, namely that, in so far as Kant can be said to have a 'meta-critical' view of his own work at all, it is certainly a merely *implicit* account, that can only be inferred by the commentator, but that is never formally stated. Moreover, in pronouncing this meta-critical theory 'often ignored', he lends credence to the notion we have already mentioned; namely that despite its importance, the question of the possibility of Kant's project is a widely neglected one. Perhaps Hamann's most important contention is that Kant has merely *assumed* that his modus operandi, that of simply reflecting upon the structure of his own reason, can actually yield 'the complete system of reason' as it really is.[68]

Hamann's criticism of Kant is historically significant in that it identifies a philosophical trend that would become a quasi-essential proprium of the broad 'German Idealism', that was soon to emerge.[69] As Beiser tells us, this fundamentally lies in the fact that 'Hamann's essay ... states one of the central goals of all post-Kantian philosophy: the search for the inner unity, the common source of Kant's dualisms.'[70]

66. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, 41.

67. Ibid., 42.

68. Ibid., 43.

69. Yet despite this anticipation of much post-Kantian philosophy, Hamann's meta-criticism of Kant is otherwise somewhat atypical; few would agree with his basic premise, that language is prior to reason.

70. Ibid., 43.

2.1.2 The Wolffian counter-attack, and questioning the need for sensible 'intuitions'

A very different early meta-critique of Kant came in the form of a counter-attack from the Wolffian 'dogmatists', the object of the ire of Kant throughout the first critique. The Wolffians held that a true critique of reason would, unlike the one carried out by Kant, only serve to *validate* their belief in the efficacy of the traditional metaphysical method. They rejected Kant's assumption that the real extension of our knowledge (rather than the merely analytic and ultimately tautological unpacking of the meanings of words) was contingent upon the presence of *a priori* (and for Kant, necessarily sensible) *intuitions*, holding instead that reason could itself yield genuine *a priori* results that nonetheless genuinely extend our knowledge.[71] This is because broadly speaking, for the Wolffians (as well as for Leibniz and numerous earlier Scholastics) principles of reason are also principles of being, not merely of human cognition—there is thus nothing to prevent them naturally applying 'beyond' human cognition to things-in-themselves.[72] The Wolffian counter-attack also largely rejected Kant's account of analytic and synthetic propositions. It instead saw the truth of such propositions in terms of their determination by the governing principles of Wolffian philosophy, namely the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of sufficient reason. The former determine *a priori* analytic propositions, and the latter *a priori* synthetic propositions[73] (whereas Kant maintains that the latter can only obtain upon the synthesis of concept and intuition). Instead of a sensible intuition being required in order to serve as the 'substratum' as it were, of the terms in a synthetic *a priori* judgement, for the Wolffians the determination of the validity and truth of such a judgement is

71. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 199.

72. Ibid., 196.

73. Ibid., 200.

effected by the mere fact that the subject of a given proposition can serve as a sufficient reason for its predicate.[74]

Another line of Wolffian criticism cuts more convincingly at the very possibility of Kant's project. This line of attack is provoked by his theory that the principles of reason are true only of appearances, but not of things-in-themselves. As Beiser characterizes this broad position:

> It is self-refuting to maintain that the principles of logic are true only for appearances, they argue, for such a proof has to be true of us not only as appearances but also as things-in-themselves.[75]

That is, the very proof that rational principles are true only for appearances itself employs rational principles and, in order to be *true*, must be true not merely of appearances but moreover of things-in-themselves. This elegant *reductio* shows that Kant's critical method is self-defeating; in order to establish its own principles (such as 'the principles of logic only apply to appearances') it must invoke, outside of any possible experience, concepts and principles that it itself insists can only apply to possible experiences. A similar line of argument would also be taken up by the next contemporary of the *Critique* we will examine.

2.1.3 Ernst Platner, Schulze, and Hegel 'turning the Critique against itself'

Ernst Platner (1744-1818), whose main work was his *Philosophische Aphorismen* (*Philosophical Aphorisms*), was a prominent early critic of Kant's new philosophy.[76] Although

74. Ibid., 200.

75. Ibid., 201.

76. For Platner's relationship to Kant, see also Falk Wunderlich, 'Platner on Kant: From Scepticism to Dogmatic Critique, in Corey W. Dyck and Falk Wunderlich (eds.), *Kant and His German Contemporaries: Logic, Mind, Epistemology, Science and Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018.

hailing from a broadly Leibnizian-Wolffian background, he eventually repudiated his 'dogmatic' approach in favour of scepticism. However, this remained at the expense of Kant. For Platner, we encounter in Kant merely another form of dogmatist. This line of criticism is precisely one aimed at the question of the very possibility of the critical enterprise, because it turns 'the critique against itself',[77] concluding that 'all the criticisms Kant makes against metaphysics apply in equal measure to his own epistemology.'[78] 'According to Platner, Kant's 'methods and arguments are just as dogmatic as those of the metaphysician.'[79]

Beiser sums up Platner's meta-critical account of the possibility of the critical project in a way that accords with the statements of W.H. Walsh that we have already seen:

> Kant's negative statements about things-in-themselves are just as dogmatic as the positive statements of the metaphysician. The negative statement that things-in-themselves do not exist in space and time, for example, trespasses against Kant's limits upon knowledge ... Kant is much too hasty and dogmatic in his attempt to demonstrate that all our knowledge is limited to experience. Such a demonstration, if not carefully qualified, is self-refuting, for *it cannot be justified through experience*.[80]

Yet another contemporary criticism of Kant's failure to account for the possibility of his own critical method, that of Gottlob Ernst Schulze (1761-1833), provides a further example of just how early on in the reception of Kant foundational inconsistencies had been widely identified in his thought. Kant set strict standards for the 'examination of the instrument' of human cog-

77. Ibid., 215.

78. Ibid., 215.

79. Ibid., 216.

80. Ibid., 216-217.

nition in traditional metaphysics, while conveniently exempting himself from this requirement, abstaining all the while from providing any form of justification for having done so.

The central thrust of Schulze's important critique of Kant thus bears more than a passing resemblance to that of Platner. Schulze wishes to point out that Kant's limitation of all possible knowledge to that of mere appearances, necessarily entails that his own critical philosophy, as involving claims to knowledge, also be limited in the same way to appearances. Yet since Kant views his critical conclusions (such as 'knowledge can only be of appearances') as factual knowledge claims, he seems clearly to have absolved his own philosophical procedure from the need for self-examination, thereby falling into the very dogmatism that it is his stated and celebrated *raison d'être* to oppose.[81]

So a common thread unites these various early 'metacriticisms' of Kant. This is the sense, which we have seen in the Wolffians, Platner and Schulze, that it is self-refuting for Kant to maintain that all possible knowledge involves 'experience' (the synthesis of concept and intuition) that can only ever constitute 'appearance'. Again, this is because the very claim that all possible knowledge is such, itself represents a claim to knowledge which cannot possibly be verified in or derived from experience. Moreover, even were it the case, per impossibile, that such a proposition could be verified in 'experience', on Kant's own terms it would thus be rendered no more than appearance, and could not be thus genuinely descriptive of the way things *really are*.

81. See ibid., 270 and 281. See also Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity*, 33-34: 'For others, the problem with Kant was not that he had been too skeptical about such knowledge but that he had not been skeptical enough, that he ought to have been skeptical about his own claims to be able to determine the necessary conditions of experience. There was no good reason to believe, as some, such as Schulze (or "Aenesidemus") argued, that reason was at all capable of determining the conditions without which any knowledge would be impossible, and better reason to believe Kant had merely catalogued the psychological workings of the mind in a way itself open to much doubt and certainly in no necessary connection with what objects, even objects of experience, must be or could not fail to be.'

Perhaps the most famous 'meta-critical' objection to Kant of them all, finds its locus classicus in Hegel's *Logic*. It bears a close resemblance to the major criticism of the Wolffians, that in formulating his critical conclusions, Kant cannot help but employ the selfsame rational principles he will go on to conclude only apply to appearances. In Hegel's formulation, this becomes the more general observation that it is a stark absurdity to attempt to subject the ability of human cognition to produce truth to a critique, when that critique can only be carried out from *within* human cognition. In Hegel's words:

> A main line of argument in the Critical Philosophy ... tells us first of all to examine the faculty of cognition and see whether it is equal to such an effort. We ought, says Kant, to become acquainted with the instrument before we undertake the work for which it is to be employed; for if the instrument be insufficient, all our trouble will be spent in vain ... But the examination of knowledge can only be carried out by an act of knowledge. To examin this so-called instrument is the same thing as to know it. But to seek to know before we know is as absurd as the wise resolution of Scholasticus, not to venture into the water until he had learned to swim.[82]

2.1.4 Kant in the raiment of his pragmatist progeny: Contemporary approaches to the metacritical problem

We have already noted that earlier critiques of the critique have tended to identify difficulties pertaining to the broad 'metacritical' rubric of the *possibility* of the critical project, and to conclude that these difficulties amount to straightforward

82. Hegel, *Hegel's Logic, Being Part One of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. W. Wallace, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978, 14.

contradictions, which formally *rule out* the possibility that the procedure and main aims and conclusions of the first *Critique* could even in principle be fully consistent. Several much more recent commentators, however, such as Walsh, Beck and Rescher, share in something different; they attempt to defend Kant, simply by proposing that the status of his critical principles be downgraded, in a manner which it is scarcely possible to think would have been acceptable to Kant himself.

Walsh attempts to cast Kant's critical principles as mere records of the apparently 'universal and necessary' features of repeated, everyday human experience, but acknowledges that this would imply—contrary to Kant's emphatic statements as to their necessity, which we are about to see—that the same principles are ultimately contingent (because in principle at least, an unexpected human experience could yield entirely different results). Beck inclines to an attempt to treat the problem by subordinating the claims of the first *Critique* to the practical requirements of the second *Critique*. Similarly, Rescher would have us believe that Kant's critical principles should be seen as fundamentally pragmatic in nature, in being ultimately subordinated to the merely practical aim of *creating* an ordered rational system.[83]

Lewis White Beck's often excellent article, *Toward a Meta-Critique of Pure Reason*, is perhaps the most well-known amongst the vanishingly small number of writings that take the problem of the possibility of Kant's first *Critique* as their specific focus. Beck begins by unambiguously stating that the identity of 'the genuine method of the *Critique of Pure Reason* remains a point of dispute to the present day.'[84] This is because many of Kant's foundational starting points, like his notion that the only form of intuition—the direct cognition of particu-

83. See Nicholas Rescher, *Kant and the Reach of Reason: Studies in Kant's Theory of Rational Systemization*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, 184-187.

84. Lewis White Beck, 'Toward a Meta-Critique of Pure Reason', in *Essays on Kant and Hume*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1978, 22.

lars—is sensible intuition, seem strictly speaking to be nothing more than assumptions. As Beck tells us:

> No proof of that is attempted anywhere in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and is in fact denied by many other philosophers. Not only is it not proved, it is not even a well-formed judgement under the rubrics allowed in the *Critique*, for it is neither analytic nor a posteriori, and if it is synthetic yet known *a priori*, none of the arguments so painfully mounted in the *Critique* to show that such knowledge is possible has anything to do with how we know this (if indeed we do know it). Here seems to be a contingent fact—contingent because a non-sensible intuition is consistently conceivable—yet, unlike other contingent facts, not discovered by anything comparable to observations by which we know the contingent fact that men with two eyes are better at seeing depth than men with one eye. Such judgements are brutely factual yet in some not well-defined sense self-evident; they are factual but not empirical.[85]

When Beck refers to this 'brute factuality', he means 'Kant repeatedly admits that he cannot tell why there are only two forms of human intuition and why our intuition is sensible and our understanding discursive.'[86] The passage from the first *Critique* Beck cites is B145-146, in which Kant admits that 'for the peculiarity of our understanding ... a further ground may be offered just as little as one can be offered for why we have precisely these and no other functions for judgement or why space and time are the sole forms of our possible intuition.'[87] It is because of examples of stark statements from Kant like this one, which seem to suggest that many of his most important principles lack meaningful evidence, that Beck calls for a 'meta-critique' of pure

85. Ibid., 24-25.

86. Ibid., 25.

87. See *CpR*, B145-146, 254.

reason, in order to investigate 'the nature and justification (if there can be one) of the knowledge claims *used* in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.' Yet Beck also admits that because of the absence of clear solutions in Kant's own work, providing such a meta-critique is no easy task.[88] Beck does however commit to the attempt to begin to provide 'a possible approach to its solution.'[89]

Beck, then, wishes to find a way of determining whether the presuppositions of the *Critique* are *true* or not, yet finds himself faced with the profound difficulty that the limits on knowledge, which Kant himself sets, pose to the possibility of determining the truth of those very presuppositions. Kant has limited knowledge to 'experience', that is, in its barest essentials the synthesis of concept and intuition, but he has only limited knowledge in this way due to presuppositions which, because they do not constitute syntheses of concepts and intuitions, can paradoxically never constitute knowledge. In Beck's memorable words, the *Critique* thus 'seems to be suspended from nothing in heaven and supported by nothing on earth.'[90] Despite defining the problem of 'meta-critique' with great clarity, Beck's 'possible approach to a solution' seems only to confirm the potentially fatal nature of the problem. He follows Hegel in acknowledging that one cannot engage in a critique of the very cognition that one must necessarily employ in the act of trying to critique it, and concludes that 'if there is meta-critique, it must be internal.'[91] Beck then unequivocally states that Kant 'has no explicit theory of how we come to know of the operations and faculties of abilities of the mind.'[92]

Yet the solution that Beck has 'sketchily outlined', and which he acknowledges is similar to that put forward by Walsh in

88. Lewis White Beck, 'Toward a Meta-Critique of Pure Reason', 25.

89. Ibid., 25.

90. Ibid., 30. The same can be said, with equal or greater justice, of most of those children of Kant, the contemporary schools of analytic and continental philosophy.

91. Ibid., 33.

92. Ibid., 33.

'Philosophy and Psychology in Kant's Critique' in involving a 'demythologizing of Kant', seeks to make the critical process of determining the nature of the operations and faculties of our minds a matter merely of 'discovering' the contingent appearances of our intellectual abilities, which ultimately only means *what they seem like to Kant*. This is a quasi-inductive process of trial-and-error, rather than the attempt to determine the ontological statuses of *actual* faculties and of their relationship with being *as it is beyond our faculties*, and indeed of ascertaining whether Kant's statements about their epistemological productivity are noumenal or merely phenomenal claims. For Beck, then, Kant's assertions about the nature of our faculties and the resultant limitations placed on knowledge are yielded and justified only by the supposed fact that these are the faculties we just 'happen' to find in ordinary experience. We do not come to know them by possessing some form of access to a trans-empirical 'intelligible' realm, which would require the non-sensible intuition which Kant's system precludes, but rather by simply *experiencing* our own intellectual abilities, almost 'phenomenologically' and inferring that the best way to account for them is by positing the faculties of sensibility, understanding and reason.

The vast inadequacy of Beck's attempt at an apology on Kant's behalf (despite his very helpful depiction of the problem itself), arises from the fact that the only possible way that one can determine the truth or otherwise of non-empirical statements about empirical particulars (such as that they represent mere appearances rather than noumenal entities, or that they are necessarily constituted by concepts and intuitions) would be to do so from a vantage point that is non-empirical. If we possess no prior epistemological 'space' in which it is possible to verify true but non-empirical statements, the statement that only syntheses of sensibility and understanding ('experience') can be productive of knowledge is *simply not known to be true*. It may well be (at least we can say so for the sake of argument) that faculties resembling 'sensibility' and 'understanding' as depicted by Kant are indeed just the fundamental 'faculties',

which we would each of us as individual human beings find we are equipped with, if only we looked carefully enough, but the jump from this notion to one that entails, for example, that knowledge can decisively *only ever* be of appearances, and that there is *no* faculty of non-sensible intuition, simply cannot be justified on Kant's own terms; and yet without these assumptions, the most important conclusions of Kant's theoretical philosophy collapse like a house of cards. Beck concedes that 'we cannot show, as Kant repeatedly confesses, why they must be so and not otherwise' yet nonetheless believes that Kant has 'good reasons' for thinking that our faculties are constituted, and our knowledge limited, in the ways that he claims. Yet most perplexingly, the 'good reasons' that Beck cites simply involve the very Kantian assumptions that in a meta-critique we are trying to account for, and cannot thus simply assume. For example, a 'good reason' for affirming the limitedness of knowledge to 'experience' as defined by Kant is meant to be represented by the fact that this limitedness makes room for genuine faith by denying us actual knowledge of the existence of God, because if we could actually *know* that God existed for certain, actions conforming to the moral law would be performed out of fear, rather than hope or duty.[93] Yet the meta-critical question is how we *know* that knowledge is *actually* thus limited. Any answer which replies that if knowledge were thus limited, we would be more hopeful and dutiful than fearful, merely attempts to rescue Kant's already highly vulnerable theoretical assumptions, by subordinating them to his practical assumptions, which, it is eminently arguable, are even more tenuous.

Most crucially, this is a far cry from what Kant himself claims. Indeed, this type of strategy faces the problem of the existence of Kant's own, repeated claims that his critical principles are *factual*, and absolutely certain. We have already seen

93. Ibid., 36. What about being performed out of wonder at the beauty of the signs of God and His hierarchy of being, and at the beauty of soul that is bestowed upon the one who conforms to the moral law?

Kant's very late statement, concerning the first *Critique's* 'fully secured foundation, established forever'. The *Critique* itself contains numerous, unequivocal statements affirming that the principles of the *Critique* are certain and indeed 'necessary'. As he tells us in the preface to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, (xv), 'As far as certainty is concerned, I have myself pronounced the judgement that in this type of inquiry it is in no way allowed to hold opinions (...) For every cognition that is supposed to be certain *a priori* proclaims that it wants to be held for absolutely necessary, and even more is this true of a determination of all pure cognitions *a priori*, which is to be the standard and thus even the example of all apodictic certainty.'[94] In his commentary on the *Critique*, A.C. Ewing characterizes this passage as 'Kant's audacious claim to completeness and certainty for his philosophy, a claim which he never withdraws.'[95] It is notable that in this passage, Kant claims a unique status for his own critical philosophy, charged with the 'determination of all pure cognitions *a priori* ', which is not only an example of necessity and certainty but the standard thereof. A similar claim emerges in the Transcendental Aesthetic, concerning Kant's views on the *necessary* ideality of time and space, which, he is certain, grounds the radical transcendental idealism that he promotes. An 'important concern' he tells us, 'of our transcendental aesthetic is that it not merely earn some favour as a plausible hypothesis, but that it be as certain and indubitable as can ever be demanded of a theory that is to serve as an organon'.[96]

It seems unlikely, then, that Kant would appreciate 'charitable' interpretations of his work claiming that the conclusions of his transcendental idealism merely represent contingent features of ordinary human experience.

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94. *CpR*, A xvi.

95. A.C. Ewing, *A Short Commentary on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1938, 14.

96. *CpR*, A 46/B 64.

2.1.5 The metacritique of Kant summons the presence of Platonism

The broad interpretation of Kant's achievement or lack thereof that fits the evidence considerably better, is that made by the next generation of philosophers after Kant, particularly Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, who can, somewhat loosely, be said to be his followers, in so far as it was the challenge posed by the monumental confusion (laced with remarkable half-insights) of Kant's philosophy that spurred them on to create striking and original new forms of philosophy. We were able to catch a glimpse of some of these thinkers prior to our discussion of the more recent attempt to make of Kant a pragmatist. Indeed, before the rise of the pseudo-philosophical linguistic and logical analysis of the analytic 'tradition', these (albeit broad-church) followers of Kant were the shapers of the so-called 'idealist' philosophical establishment which for over a century after Kant's death remained dominant. A sentiment common amongst these thinkers was that although Kant should be lauded for his foregrounding of the necessary conditions of knowledge and for his exposé of naïve empiricist immanentism, and the more credulous amongst forms of abstractive realism, he was led astray by some of his own dogmatic assumptions, such that in invalidating the claims of these forms of philosophy he thought that he had proved the impossibility of any form of objectivist metaphysics. But he had not.

Kant simply did not have adequate knowledge of certain higher forms of metaphysics, that are quite immune to his attempts at critique. Indeed, they render Kant's critical project superfluous, in so far as they have already fully appreciated the failings of 'dogmatic' forms of philosophy, while also circumventing Kant's own fatal dogmatisms. As Douglas Hedley tells us, 'Kant's exposure of theoretical metaphysics was of the rather arid baroque scholasticism of the eighteenth-century German university',[97] not of higher forms of metaphysics, whereas some of Kant's anti-empiricist admirers could provide

97. Douglas Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion: Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 151.

a palliative to his self-restriction exactly because they recognised a 'metaphysical tradition' that was 'broader and richer'[98] than anything Kant had been aware of, chiefly the 'Neoplatonic' (really the Platonic) tradition[99] which, almost alone amongst the great systems of human thought, could affirm and even celebrate Kant's exposé of the naivety of dominant forms of abstractive realism—in their groundless and ultimately absurd claim that the *intelligibility* of the world can ever be isolated and self-contained purely immanently in the particular—while simultaneously bypassing Kant's main dualistic faux pas, namely his self-refuting insistence that he possesses objective knowledge of the impossibility of objective knowledge. This sense, that in Neoplatonism we have a powerful philosophy capable of remedying the errors of Kant, as also of clarifying his considerable insights about the necessity of the *a priori* framework of knowledge, certainly may have been one reason why 'the idealistic turn of the post-Kantian philosophy in Germany … created a philosophical climate favourable for a new interest in Neoplatonism in general.'[100] Certainly, for the main transmitter of the thought of Kant and German Idealism to England and the primary inspiration behind the rise of British Idealism, also 'nurtured on the Cambridge Platonists, and their spiritual metaphysics', namely Samuel Taylor Coleridge,

> metaphysics was not a dogmatic illusion based upon the application of concepts beyond their legitimate range, but meant a life-forming vision, and a manly

98. Ibid., 152.

99. The fullest and most compelling justification for the identification of Neoplatonism with Platonism, against the older orthodoxy, is to be encountered in the many and excellent works of Lloyd Gerson, particularly his *From Plato to Platonism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), as well as *Platonism and Naturalism*.

100. Peter Adamson and Filip Karfik, 'Proclus' Legacy' in *All From One: A Guide to Proclus*, ed. Pieter d'Hoine and Marije Martijn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 313.

> resistance to the 'pugnacious dogmatism of partial Reflection.'[101]

Schelling and Hegel had been similarly nurtured and enriched, despite their acknowledged and vast debt to Kant, by influences from an altogether deeper region of philosophy. Schelling was famously and often brilliantly enraptured by the philosophy of Plotinus.[102] Hegel not only 'professed to have found all the secrets of his dialectic in Plato's *Parmenides*,[103] but moreover saw the Platonic commentator Proclus' thought as representing the single pinnacle of the Greek philosophical achievement; Hegel indeed 'communicates with Proclus, as if he was looking back from the highest peak in the history of the universal Spirit at its penultimate peak.'[104]

The aptness of German Idealism to dissolve Kant's quasi-Magian dualisms, especially his distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves, seemed to free philosophy from the spectre of subjectivism and open up the possibility of a real and renewed metaphysical knowledge, now decisively freed by Kant from the absurdities of empiricist phenomenalism. Yet in rightly rejecting the voluntary Locked-in syndrome chosen by Kant—with his thesis of the imposition of pseudo-intelligibility *upon* the object—in favour of the identification

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101. Ibid. The quotation Hedley cites is from Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*, ed. John Beer (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1994), 241.

102. See the article by one of the greatest representatives of living Platonism of recent times, Werner Beierwaltes, 'The Legacy of Neoplatonism in F. W. J. Schelling's Thought', trans. Peter Adamson, International Journal of Philosophical Studies, 10:4, 2002, 393-428.

103. J.N Findlay, *Ascent to the Absolute: Metaphysical Papers and Lectures* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970), 249. 'Hegel's following of Plato is evinced in his choice of the *Begriff*, the Notion, as his categorical Absolute, of which the Idea is the mature phase: the former being a principle of Universality which also declares itself in Specificity and Individuality, while the latter further embodies the Livingness and the Mindedness in which Universality declares itself supremely. Ibid., 262.

104. Peter Adamson and Filip Karfik, 'Proclus' Legacy', 313

of thought and reality, it is arguable that many of the German idealists quite inadvertently *levelled* reality, reducing it to the merely *immanent* dimensions of thought.[105] What one might call the *Platonic* notion of 'appearances' acknowledges that sensible reality is merely an imperfect copy of things as they are, the pristinely intelligible world of beauty and splendour, accessible in the right conditions, to the illuminated intellect freed by the purified soul; and the averral of some form of distinction between 'appearance and reality' is thus crucial, exactly in order to bring the privileged status of *reality* into clearest relief. But in dissolving this distinction in its implausible *Kantian* form, the German idealists may not have managed truly to escape from Kant's remarkably obdurate quagmire, because in broadly discounting the possibility of henological ascent parallel to the degrees of intrinsically hierarchical being, they ironically *confined* themselves to appearances; just, unlike Kant, they were convinced that what were *really* mere appearances *were* things-in-themselves. That is, in dissolving the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves, they only identified, as things-in-themselves, what were in actual fact mere appearances. One might put this another way by saying that in seeking to carry out a critical affirmation of the prospects of human knowledge against Kant's excesses, many of the German idealists *identified* what is really only the *immanent* form of reason *with being*, thereby forever closing

105. We cannot contribute here to the fascinating debate about immanent and transcendent interpretations of Hegel, but the great bulk of the evidence seems to strongly favour the former interpretation. One of the best expositions of the immenentist view is that of Anselm K. Min 'Hegel's Absolute: Transcendent or Immanent?' *The Journal of Religion* 56, no. 1 (1976): 61-87, although Min himself advocates some rather strained argumentation for the transcendent view. In summarizing the immanentist interpretation, Min notes that many commentators on Hegel understand him to teach 'that the Absolute has no reality of its own, its reality being exhaustively definable in terms of the totality of finite beings even if it could not be identified with any one finite being or even with all finite beings as an aggregate, and that it has no proper self-consciousness except insofar as it is mediated by the self-consciousness of finite spirits' (62).

the door to the hope that philosophy could ever transcend that mere outermost tip of intellect. Indeed,

> The Germanic Platonism [of the German idealists] suffers from a deep fault which the passing years have made all too evident: it is too entirely this-worldly, too tied down to place and to period, too deeply reliant on actual arrangements in which we can no longer trust. It rightly sees in Nature and History the eternal strategy of the Idea, but it is misguided in thinking that the whole of this strategy can be dug out here, and that, moreover, in the trivial span of centuries that we call 'world-history'. (…)

Instead,

> we should take seriously, and not as a mere myth, the otherworldly prospects offered us by Platonism and Neoplatonism, the prospect of a spectrum of states leading from sensuousness and corporeality and this-world immersion to an increasing attenuation of these things, until we end in the pure enjoyment of the total gist and sense of the world, and of the supreme Unity in which that gist culminates.[106]

Let us ask, in drawing to a close: what it is that motivated Kant to make his stark separation between intuition and concept, the root of all his subsequent woes? He must surely have been cognizant of the evident fact that intuitions, the *singular* representation *in direct relation* to the object, can only be identified *as such* through *concepts*. In Kant's attempt to *single out* the form of sensibility, so that it alone can process (the otherwise totally inchoate) matter of sensibility, namely the sensation that is the sole locus of affections *caused* by the noumena, we are

106. Findlay, *Ascent to the Absolute*, 264.

faced with *intelligible content*. And in the likewise supposedly sub-categorical hylomorphism of sensibility, form and matter, and in the putatively predicateless noumena, we possess further examples of irreducibly *intelligible* content, 'singular', 'cause', 'in relation to', and so on, each of which loudly defies Kant's neat compartmentalization of the elements of cognition into i) intuitions *devoid* of relational and categorical intelligibility, and ii) purely general concepts, which are not intrinsically related to objects. And how can Kant define noumena through negation from the known, and still (necessarily) ascribe being, unity and multiplicity, causality and relation to the noumena? Whereas 'the unconditioned' is revealed by henology, for which we have the most exacting warrant possible, to wit, intellectual intuition of the Forms of first principles of intelligibility which alone make possible any distinct cognition whatever, Kant's attempt to justify his unconditioned noumena is a shambles of flagrant self-refutation and contradiction. The path to the absolute principle of unity is embedded in the structure of both being and knowing; by what right can Kant claim to have barred that route, based on his tenuous assumptions? Both Kant's transcendental unity of apperception, and his intuitions, are only *intelligible* in terms of the conceptual apparatuses of the Categories. Without them, they simply disappear. In reality, it is the framework of *distinct intelligibility*, known initially through intellectual intuition, that is the true 'given', and it is absurd to define sensible intuition, inescapably *through* that prior framework of intelligibility, and then insist that it is 'actually' independent and cut off. And which faculty is Kant using when he tells us that the 'ideas of pure reason' must necessarily yield transcendental illusion (unless, of course, they are lucky enough to simply be guiding the categories to apply themselves to intuitions)? Indeed, *where* does Kant think that he *is*, when he is neatly separating sensible intuition, the understanding, and reason; in what domain is he doing the separating?

To be is to be intelligible, and the attempt to separate the real from its intrinsic intelligibility is folly, to separate the

'object' from its knowability, being from knowing, sensibility from the understanding. Yet this dualist attempt to wrench reality into two has been the tendency of a certain variety of human soul for all time; this is even attested to in as venerable a source of ancient wisdom as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, in which this separation is soberly discounted:

> The sensory perception and understanding may seem to differ: one is connected with *matter* and the other with *being*. To me they both seem to be one and without difference; I mean in man. For in other living beings sense is one with nature, but there is understanding in man. Now sense and understanding both flow together in man, as they are entwined with each other. It is neither possible to understand without sense nor to sense without understanding … sense … partly belongs to the body and partly to the soul; and whenever both parts of sense are in unison, understanding arises, being born from *Nous*.[107]

As I have shown in *Things as They Are*, our capacity for sensation, as well as its objects, are each intrinsically and inextricably imbued with the intelligible. Now, when the immanent dimension of the intelligible, in the sense of the mental existence of our rational and conceptual apparatuses, is viewed as it indeed can be, in isolation from the extramental world of particulars, it is revealed as a world of greater generality and distinct intelligibility than the sensible, which nonetheless represents a more limited manifestation of pure intelligibility, more distinctly accessible to our intelligence than to our senses. It is when these truths are assented to that the necessity for the *relationship* between the two domains to have been

107. 'Hermes to Asclepius' in *The Way of Hermes: New Translations of The Corpus Hermeticum and the Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*, translated by Clement Salaman, Dorine Van Oyen, William D. Wharton and Jean-Pierre Mahe (London: Duckworth, 1999), 42.

defined in a principle of unity *that transcends both* becomes established, the transcendent rather than immanent 'intelligible world'; without this, neither would exist at all.[108] There, the necessary *principle of the relationship* between image and essence resides, that is, *the world of symbols*.[109] These multiplicitous images and essences are in turn resolved into a world of pure incorporeal meanings, imbued with life and irreducible personhood, the world of spirits; irreducible that is, in relation to any other finite domain, but ultimately a gift of the Immutable Archetypes, being generously made to overflow, these latter identical in being though not in determination to the Divine Names. Concepts, and the general phenomenon of the *mental experience* of distinct intelligibles as intentional objects, are not only the effects of intelligible objects underlying these immanent appearances of concepts, but are also signifiers of the possibility of *experiencing* those objects. The 'one over the many' is in practical terms simply a symbol of the real possibility afforded to us, by our very natures, of direct contact with the intelligible world; the unseen which is, in the spirit, our home, from whence we have come and where we will return.

108. I do not cease to come back to the late Jens Halfwassen's masterful summation of the argument of *Enneads* VI.6, when he says: 'that which is presupposed by each intellective act from its very beginning cannot itself be the *product* of an intellective act which presupposes it. An intellective act originally positing unity would not be unitary before this position and would therefore be nothing, and thus not be a thought either. The One presupposed by every intellective act as a condition for taking place does therefore not rest upon the subjective positioning of Thought itself, but rather necessarily precedes all subjective unifying actions of Thought.' (Jens Halfwassen, 'The Metaphysics of the One', in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, eds. Pauliina Remes and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin, London: Routledge, 2014), 185. This startling truth finds application in our specific context is so far as intelligible content *appears* immanently both in minds and as presupposed by the intelligibility in the sense of knowability of the sensible world (sensible objects presenting themselves as 'distinct', 'one' and in relation, for example). The ground of these twin and interacting modes of instantiation cannot be the mind's *imposition*, for otherwise they would not both exist; their relationship must be defined in a level of being prior to both of these domains of immanent appearance, that constitutes their principle of unity.

109. Or, 'imaginal representations'.

It is a matter of the greatest urgency that we divest ourselves of the modernist, and enormously spiritually immature genetic fallacy which alone guides our all too ubiquitous aversion to 'Platonic', 'Neoplatonic' (or any of the many other 'foreign') sources of wisdom, that do not accord with our empiricist biases; for we know that 'wisdom is the lost property of the believer', and we possess, in revelation, the supreme statement of the unification of the superinstantial and the instantial, of being and knowing, and of the hierarchy of manifestation, in *And there is no thing, but that We possess its treasuries, and We do not cause it to descend except in a measure that is known* (Qur'an 15:21). The Qur'an itself is showing us, and it shows us in many other of its sacred verses, that metaphysics is not merely possible. It is actual.

> *We will show them Our signs on the horizons and within their own selves, until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth* (Qur'an 41:53).[110]

To attempt once more to come to a close. Did Kant really believe in his own critical philosophy, or was his work ultimately the product of the voluntarist prioritization of will over intellect that characterized his project of the sub-essential self-determination of individual freedom? Was he a Luther in the realm of metaphysics who simply wished to break with 'Authority' and tradition at whatever cost, even at the cost of the promotion of evident sophistry and falsehood? We cannot of course judge Kant's innermost intentions; and so we will never know for certain. It can doubtless be argued that Kant merely reacted in good faith and with philosophical sincerity to some of the very real deficiencies of the severely limited philosophical options available to him in eighteenth-century Europe, and that had he been alive in the time of a Plotinus, or a Meister Eckhart, or indeed a Mulla Fenari, the desperate dif-

110. 'It is the truth' can also be validly translated 'He is the Real'.

ficulties he perceived in the relationship between concepts and 'objects' might never have arisen.

My own belief is that the work of Kant, and especially the process of overcoming the difficulties that it has raised can, perhaps in some happy irony of Providence, greatly fortify true metaphysics as it now makes its return, in summoning altogether deeper forms of philosophy to the fore in order to dispel Kant's uncritical illusions (which are certainly rightly characterized as such, but that nonetheless in some sense arise, at least certain amongst them, from Kant's identifying the question of *how to account for the intelligibility of the world* as the most foundational question in philosophy, which can only be regarded as praiseworthy). These more integral philosophies, we must be thankful, do not suffer from the abstractionist circularities which immanentist accounts of the intelligibility of the world cannot help but perpetuate, the result of the inexplicable prioritization of the individual and the particular which that very broad school favours.

Kant's attempt, conscious or otherwise, to imprison man within the low-ceilinged dungeons of his 'free' subjectivity cannot succeed —for this is in the nature of things—however long, hitherto, it has contrived to shackle the human spirit.

> *The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished; indeed, falsehood is ever bound to vanish* (Qur'an 17:81).

2.2
CONCLUSION

Based on the evidence that we have marshalled and analysed in this exposition, it is just to conclude that despite his claims of a 'critique' of reason, Kant simply fails to provide an account of the mechanisms by which he purports to establish his key conclusions. Because of the non-empirical nature both of the principial starting points and of the conclusions that Kant puts forward—many of which we have exposed to view in this paper—and his limitation of knowledge to that which pertains to possible sensible experience, there is simply no way in which, on Kant's own terms, such non-empirical conclusions can be consistently deemed genuine truths. In order for them to have been so characterized, Kant would have needed to have employed reason *constitutively*, beyond his conditions of possible experience, and to have invoked a faculty of intellectual intuition; a faculty which he has explicitly denied we have any possible access to at all. But even then, his conclusions would have been self-refuting; they would have represented instances of precisely the noumenal knowledge that the same conclusions are supposed to have ruled out.

Although Kant claims to have conclusively shown in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that general and special metaphysics as traditionally understood are impossible, all he has in fact been able to achieve with respect to this goal, is to have provided an account of what human cognition *would* look like *if it were the case*, as indeed he so wishes it to be, that general and special metaphysics are impossible. Indeed, Kant seems to have decided upon his conclusion before he sets out to legitimize it. Yet because his own critical principles are inescapably hypothetical and contingent, showing the *impossibility* of traditional metaphysics is strictly out of his reach.

By 'contingent', we mean that Kant's own failure, given his own epistemological commitments, to specify the manner in

which he has arrived at his own non-empirical conclusions, entails the ever-present possibility that those conclusions are simply false. Indeed, we have shown that their falsity is actual. This is due to the fact that, because Kant rules out the actuality of intellectual intuition into an intelligible state of affairs underlying the sensible world, his pronouncements on the nature of the apparatuses of our human cognition and the limits of our knowledge necessarily arise by analysing the features of experience, ultimately individual experiences, given colour by his own ungrounded, non-empirical interpretations of those experiences. Yet Kant claims necessity and certainty for his critical conclusions. Now, one of the entailments of a proposition expressing a necessary truth is that it becomes impossible for the contradictory of that proposition to be true. Yet Kant claims that the principle of non-contradiction and its derivatives, such as that of excluded middle, are only true of appearances.[111] By claiming his own limitation of knowledge to appearances is *true* rather than *false*, then, he cannot help but invoke them in formulating his great 'critical' conclusions, which are meant to apply *beyond* appearances. Nothing, perhaps, more clearly sums up the lamentable failure of a great work, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, rich with philosophical insights that have informed so much of subsequent philosophy, to maintain genuine consistency at the most fundamental level.[112]

111. For a comprehensive and luminous account of the rootedness in being of the principle of non-contradiction, which includes analysis and critique of Kant's view, see Karim Lahham's ground-breaking work *The Anatomy of Knowledge and the Ontological Necessity of First Principles* (Abu Dhabi: Tabah Research, 2021).

112. The reader is cordially reminded that aspects of Kant's anti-metaphysical project can be further pursued in our *Things as They Are: Nafs al-Amr and the Metaphysical Foundations of Objective Truth*, where, as mentioned in the preface above, our constructive arguments for the possibility of metaphysics are also to be located, also to be further elucidated and uncovered in our future works, God willing.

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This short study introduces and evaluates the most fundamental paradox at the core of Kant's philosophy. This is the 'metacritical' problem of whether Kant's critical project is itself possible, a possibility that the same project has made it its mission to deny to traditional metaphysics. Kant himself held that his conclusions were merely the impartial result of an examination of the 'instrument' by means of which that metaphysics claims to have established its conclusions, human cognition itself. Yet did Kant see the implied need to subject his own critical philosophy to such a test, since it equally presupposes 'human cognition'?

Although this problem has been deemed one of the most fundamental, and indeed critical, in all Kant's philosophy by several prominent Kant exegetes, devoted treatments of the question are extremely scarce. Drawing on Platonic philosophy and the philosophical system outlined in the author's Things As They Are (2021), the study concludes that the metacritical problem is indeed fatal to Kant's anti-metaphysical aspirations, and that this elimination of such a fundamental obstacle to the practice of traditional philosophy further opens up the real possibility of a renewed metaphysics for our time.

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