
SGIR Review

Published by the Society for German Idealism and Romanticism

Volume 6, Issue 1

New York City, NY 2023

ISSN 2577-0233 (print)

ISSN 2577-025X (online)



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Jacobi's Spinoza: Inaugurating Post-Kantian Developments

Rolf Ahlers, The Sage Colleges (Professor Emeritus)

Jacobi's chief interest is to promote enlightenment serving as a beacon to orient life, guided by *the light that illumines itself as well as darkness* (JWA 1:28: 3f, MW 193, see Spinoza EIIp43sch).¹ Pursuing that goal, he showed that contrary to this intent, the “natural history of speculative philosophy” (JWA 1: 153: 36f) ends in unenlightened repressiveness destructive of all freedom. Rationality becomes irrational. This “Dialectic of Enlightenment,” discovered by Jacobi,² is now well established under the category of “The Dialectic of Enlightenment.”³ In Jacobi's view, that contradiction is central to Kant. It is also central to Spinoza. This paper unfolds in four steps: 1. Explained first will be the reasons why Jacobi considered Kant's transcendental method of “pure reason” to have decayed into irrationalism. 2. Secondly, we will point to the way Jacobi is a “*Spinozist–Antispinozist*” as the basis of

¹ Kant published his essay “Was heißt sich im Denken Orientieren?” in 1786, one year after Jacobi's *Spinozabriefe* appeared in print in 1785. It is a direct response to Jacobi's comment in the first edition of the *Spinozabriefe* that Kant's elaborations on space in KrV A 25 are written “entirely in the spirit of Spinoza” (JWA 1: 96: 3, MW 218). Below, we need to return to this issue. In that essay, “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” of 1786, the concept *Vernunftglaube* (rational faith) claims to fulfill the practical “need (*Bedürfnis*) of reason” (AA VIII 140ff), of a criterion of judgment. The term *Vernunftglaube* is mentioned eleven times in that short essay. Kant had used the terms “*moralischer Glaube* (moral belief)” and “*Vernunftglaube* (rational faith)” in his KrV of 1781, A 828–831. The practicality of this concept, which must *presume* God or a highest good to exist, is obvious *if* freedom is central. These issues, bristling with questions, are at stake between Kant and Jacobi. In the following few paragraphs, we will see that Jacobi's “*natürliche(r) Vernunftglaube* (natural faith of reason)” understands itself as “absolute objectivity” that is the *certain* criterion of reason, whereas Kant's transcendental pure reason leads “necessarily to a system of absolute subjectivity” (JWA 2:391:18–41, MW 552f). Kant's categories of his transcendentalism are for Jacobi empty “prejudices,” not based on empirically certain *reason of faith*. So, Jacobi writes to Hamann about the “*Unfug des Kantischen Orientierens* (nonsense of Kantian orientation)” (JWA 5: 482) on April 30, 1787. See on all this Hutter (2004).

² Jaeschke (2004): 206: “Jacobi ought to be seen as the discoverer of this ‘Dialectic of the Enlightenment’ even if its later rediscoverers did not discover him as the first discoverer but rather rejected him just as undialectically as irrationally as a critic of the Enlightenment.” Jaeschke asks whether this dialectic might be characteristic of reason itself. He answers: Jacobi's distinction between reason that is reasonable and reason that is not—as we find it, e.g., in the Berlin Enlighteners, such as Wieland, Biester, Nicolai and others—implies that this dialectic is not part of reason itself. See Schick (2016). I understand and render here “reason” in the sense of *Vernunft*, whereas “rationality” is *Verstand*.

³ Horkheimer, Adorno (2002). Jacobi's writings conform precisely to their dialectic, although he does not use the term “dialectic of enlightenment.” See Sandkaulen (1995): 417f. See Schick (2019): 50–77, “Kapitel 3: Jacobi und die Dialektik der Aufklärung.” Both Jacobi and Schick promote the *legitimacy* of the Enlightenment, as the title of Schick's book indicates. I agree with Schick that “the original project of the Enlightenment (was) historically realized by Kant and Jacobi” (Schick [2019]: 5). But Jacobi pursues a “different” form of the Enlightenment than Kant. See Schick (2019): 65–77. See also Sandkaulen (1995): 424, Sandkaulen (2000): 127f. See Kahlefeld (2000). I use the term “Enlightenment” capitalized to refer to *the* historical enlightenment but will also use the term in lower case to refer to philosophy's general and perennial interest in enlightenment.

his *enlightenment* and *skepticism*. Central to Jacobi's skepticism is his question regarding 3. *beginning and causation in Spinoza and Kant*, which point to 4. *Jacobi's grounds of certainty in faith*. Besides the interaction between Jacobi and Kant, the essay will marginally touch on Jacobi's influence on Fichte, Schelling, and mainly Hegel. First on Jacobi and Kant.

1) Jacobi on Kant's Pure Reason

Jacobi's writings on and interactions with Kant were probably the most important impulse initiating the post-Kantian development that is today called "German idealism" or "classical German philosophy." Dieter Henrich talks of the "double star Jacobi and Kant."⁴ Jacobi was fascinated by and affirmed the pre-critical Kant's *Der Einzig Mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* of 1763. Based on the Wolff–Leibniz tradition (according to which God's reality must and can be rationally proven), and arguing thus both the *ontological* as also the *cosmological* proofs, this essay lighted a fire in the young Jacobi, who had just returned from his studies in Geneva. He found expressed here the thought of a *necessary being prior to any reflection*. The thought of this *singular, immediately, i.e., reflexively not apparent, being* is necessarily "*welthaltig* (productive of the world)" in Henrich's words.⁵ On its basis, Jacobi became aware of the *immediately* apparent reality that originates out of the singularity of being.⁶ This is Spinoza!⁷ We know that Jacobi read Spinoza intensively at the same time. I mention this here to indicate the weight of the discussion between Kant and Jacobi that lasted all their life. Kant, who was nineteen years Jacobi's senior, agrees with Jacobi on central issues such as *Vernunftglaube* (rational faith), but then also mainly on the issue of the

⁴ Henrich (1991): 212.

⁵ Henrich (1992): 51f.

⁶ Jacobi's "logic of finding" or "logic of disclosure" or "logic of revelation" deviates from deductive or reflexive logic. See Sandkaulen (1995): 419f, 424–428 on "un-philosophical logic of finding" in contrast to deductive logic.

⁷ See EId3, EId4, EId6e, EIp1. Jacobi on Spinoza's God: "Spinoza's God is the *pure* principle of the actuality in everything actual, of *being* in everything existent; is thoroughly without individuality, and absolutely infinite. The unity of this God rests on the identity of the indivisible and hence does not exclude a sort of plurality" (JWA 1:39:8–12, MW 199). The thoughts expressed here render *verbatim* parts of §73 of Lessing's *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, on "The Doctrine of the Trinity," where he says: "What if (...) God's unity (must be conceived as) a transcendental unity which does not exclude a sort of plurality?" Jacobi specifically quotes that §73: "(T)here were things in his *Education of Mankind* that were totally inexplicable to me, especially §73. I would like to know how anyone can make sense of this passage except in accordance with Spinozistic ideas" (JWA 1: 39: 4–7, MW 198f). See EIp5d, EIp15. After observing that Lessing's §73 of the *Erziehungsschrift* is inexplicable *except* seen through "Spinozistic ideas," Jacobi adds: "With these (Spinozistic ideas) commenting that §73 is quite easy" (JWA 1: 39: 7–8, MW 199). See on Spinoza's ontological proof Bromand, Kreis (2011): 162–166.

inexplicability of freedom and causality. Jacobi even stresses that “in comparison with other opponents of this school I was myself a Kantian” (JWA 2: 350: 2f).⁸ But our focus here will be the mature Jacobi’s critique of Kant’s *pure reason* as irrational. We concentrate on one text in the third part of his *David Hume*, where he voiced his most extended critique of Kant. As mentioned, Jacobi’s realistic epistemology is based on immediate, prereflexive *Empfindung* (feeling, instinct, sensation, or faith). Human beings have a *sense*, i.e., “*instinct of reason*” for the “suprasensible” (JWA 1: 262: 31f., MW 377). It is our “principle of life” that “presents itself as the principle of all reason” (JWA 1: 263: 15f, MW 378). This philosophy of prereflexive *immediacy* is anti-aprioristic. The critical Kant’s transcendental *a priori* is therefore Jacobi’s *proton pseudos*. Concepts of reality, substance, causality, and even of existence have, beyond their use in making possible the cognition of an object, no significance at all. They have only the transcendental status of making cognition of empirical data possible.⁹ “All principles of the pure understanding are nothing beyond a priori principles of the possibility of experience, and all synthetic a priori propositions are related to the latter alone, indeed their possibility itself rests entirely on this relation” (KrV B 294).¹⁰ Jacobi replies: “Concepts of reality, substance or corporeal extension (...) have their concept-independent object in *the things in themselves*—consequently they have true, *objective*, meaning” (JWA 2: 60: 10-16, MW 296).¹¹ Kant’s concepts a priori independent of the immediacy of experience, are for Jacobi nothing but “prejudices,” i.e., concepts pre-judicial of actual experience. Pursuing his own epistemology of immediacy, Jacobi counters:

(W)e do not need to transform *these fundamental concepts and judgments* into mere *pre-judgments of the understanding, whereby they become independent of experience*. For in that case they would be prejudices from which we have to

⁸ With “this school,” Jacobi means primarily those who prioritize matter over against spirit and reason. On this issue, Jacobi certainly treads on common ground with Kant and other “criticists,” such as Fichte.
⁹ See Kant: “The concepts of reality, substance, causality, even that of necessity in existence have, beyond their use in making possible the empirical cognition of an object, no significance at all which might determine any object [*Object*]” (KrV A 677). See on this Jacobi’s comments: JWA 1: 60: 17–23, MW 296.

¹⁰ The Cambridge rendition modified.

¹¹ Foundational arguments attempting to “ground” philosophical systems or theories are, since Hegel, “obsolete” insofar as *all* philosophizing operates since Hegel with contradictions inherent in foundational thought, as is apparent at the beginning of his *Logik*. It was *Jacobi* who provided him with the tools for his “objective idealism.” I just refer here to one of many writings by Vittorio Hösle (1987) on Hegel’s objective idealism.

be *cured* by coming to recognize that they do not refer to anything that pertains to the objects *in themselves*—or, in other words, they have no *truly* objective meaning. We don't need to do this, I say, because these fundamental concepts and judgments lose none of their universality (or their necessity) by being derived from what must be the common foundation of all experiences. On the contrary, if they can be derived from the essence and the association of *individual things in general*, then they gain far higher degree of unconditional universality. *As mere prejudices of the understanding*, they would be valid only for men and for the sensibility that is proper to humans; so they would be valid only under conditions which would, in my judgment deprive them of all value. (JWA 2: 60: 24–61: 2, MW 296f).

For Jacobi, a priori concepts cleansed of all empirical content are “prejudices” that are through that process of abstraction deprived of criteria *in reality* for making objective judgments. They thereby become irrational and subjective. Stiening points out that in view of Kant's systematic critique of prejudices and its significance for the Enlightenment, Jacobi's critique is truly astounding.¹² Nonetheless, from the perspective of Jacobi's philosophy of *immediacy* that has its certainty in prereflective *faith*, Kant's “pure” transcendentalism has decayed into abstract and subjective irrationalism. Jacobi in turn claims *objectivity*, based on “objective truth and reality” available through “a simple perception” in which you “become once and for all aware (and be unshakingly convinced for your whole life) that the *I* and the *Thou*, the internal consciousness and the external object, must be present both at once in the soul even in the most primordial and simple of perceptions” (JWA 2: 38: 5–10, MW 277). Jacobi's *immediacy* displays here *personal* qualities that without much difficulty demote Kant's “pure reason” as subjectivistic (JWA 2: 63: 1–739, MW 300).¹³ It was a critique voiced not only by Jacobi but also by others, such as Johann Friedrich Feder (1740–1821) and Christian Garve (1742–1798), in reviews of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. In his second edition, Kant reacted vigorously to this critique of his thought as a *subjective idealism* (KrV B xxxix.).

¹² See on this Stiening (2022): 173–175.

¹³ Within a mere eleven lines, Jacobi talks five times of “pure reason.” He points to the “mechanism” of “pure reason,” which goes on to suggest: “The same pure reason would therefore dwell in my dog as in me” (JWA 2: 63: 5f, MW 300) if we conceded Kant's transcendental *a priori*. On the propriety of this comparison see Jaeschke (2004): 208.

We just need to add one more point to Jacobi's philosophy of *immediacy* to buttress its undeniable claim to *objectivity*. In his text where he elaborates on Kant's "pure reason," Jacobi adds a long footnote that points to God as the unavoidable *presupposition* of "absolutely pure personality":

I would not like to be misunderstood on such an important issue as this for even a moment (...), namely that absolutely pure reason presupposes an absolutely pure personality, such as belongs to God alone, and not to any created being. A pure reason that is not *absolutely* pure, however, is a fiction, or a mere abstraction. Degrees of approximation have no place here for the distinction is absolute. It implies opposition, just as does the distinction between finite and infinite, composite and simple, creature and creator. Created beings are all composite, mutually dependent on one another in their existence. (JWA 2: 63: 10–20, MW 300)

So *Vernunft* (reason) is humanity's "principle of life" (JWA 1: 263: 7f., MW 377), which "must be conceived [...] as a thoroughly independent, other-worldly and personal Being" (JWA 1: 19f, MW 378). Or, as Jacobi said in 1811 in *Von den göttlichen Dingen*, "*Consciousness of Spirit is reason. But spirit can only be immediate of¹⁴ God. For that reason, to have *Vernunft* (reason) and to know of God is one and the same thing*" (JWA 3: 104: 1–3). So this *personalistic* critique of Kant is connected in many ways to Jacobi's critique of Spinoza. For Jacobi, Spinoza's God is completely without will or personality. For Spinoza's God, identical with nature—*deus sive natura*—is an "immanent infinite cause (which) has, as such, *explicitly*, neither understanding nor will" because it has no personality (JWA 1: 19: 1f, MW 188). It leads necessarily to the dialectical self-destruction of reason.¹⁵

2) Spinoza–Antispinoza: Enlightenment and Skepticism

Jacobi decided to visit Lessing that summer of 1780¹⁶ in order to seduce him to disclose his Spinozism. Spinoza was at the time identical with atheism. For that reason,

¹⁴ In the sense of πρὸς τὸν, John 1:1.

¹⁵ See Elp29sch, Schick (2019): 60–65. See JWA 5: 114, JWA 5: 115: 35.

¹⁶ Jacobi visits Lessing at Wolfenbüttel two times, from July 5 to 11 and then a second time from August 10 to 12, 1780, in Braunschweig, and from August 12 to 15 in Halberstadt at "Father Gleim's" place. See JWA 1: 367–376. The *Spinozabriefe* themselves tell the story about how they came to be written. 376. The *Spinozabriefe* themselves tell the story about how they came to be written.

Spinoza was a “dead dog” (JWA 1: 27: 7, MW 193). Pierre Baillet had in his *Dictionnaire* interpreted Spinoza’s *deus sive natura* as atheism, but this was not exactly news, for Chr. Wolff also viewed Spinoza as an atheist. Having Lessing disclose his Spinozism gave Jacobi the tool to get even with Goethe. Goethe, toward the end of his friendship with Jacobi in the fall of 1779,¹⁷ considered him to be a hopelessly psychological *Schwärmer*, as portrayed in the heroic figure of Jacobi’s *Woldemar*. To express his displeasure and gain public support, Goethe undertook a ritualistic, public “crucifixion” of a copy of Jacobi’s *Woldemar*, nailing a copy of the book to a tree in a park at Ettersburg in the presence of notables. In his impromptu speech, Goethe publicly ridiculed *Woldemar* and its author without Jacobi’s knowledge. But the rumor mill was active. To top off the insult, Duchess Anna Amalia published a new version of *Woldemar* that was nothing but a retelling of Goethe’s parody. After some rather acrimonious back and forth, Jacobi cut off communications with Goethe in November 1779. After several years of silence, Goethe attempted a reconciliation in October 1782. It worked! Jacobi accepted the offer of the renewed friendship. Being invited by Goethe, Jacobi visited him at Weimar in the fall of 1784 after the death of Jacobi’s wife, Betty. In the meantime, Jacobi was extremely busy writing his *Spinozabriefe*. Jacobi used Goethe’s “Prometheus” without the author’s permission to solicit Lessing’s confession of his Spinozism, but also to find help arguing against Spinoza. On the second day of their meeting at Wolfenbüttel on July 6, 1780, Jacobi gave Lessing Goethe’s poem “Prometheus” to read. Jacobi: “Do you know the poem? Lessing: The poem I have never seen before, but I think that it is good (...) The point of view from which the poem is written is my own point of view (...) The orthodox concepts of the Divinity are no longer for me; I cannot stomach them. “Ἐν καὶ πᾶν” (JWA 1: 16: 14–20f, MW 178). Mendelssohn had in the meantime published his *Morgenstunden* and was deeply upset at Jacobi’s publication of their correspondence in the *Spinozabriefe* without his permission. He died soon afterward on January 4, 1786. Jacobi was widely held responsible for Mendelssohn’s death. Goethe blamed him as well. Even though this legend persists to this day, no one less than Mendelssohn’s widow, also one of Jacobi’s fiercest critics, Nicolai, rejected it as pure myth. Whereas Goethe had joined with Herder the Spinozists, Jacobi himself distanced himself from Spinoza—“what a wretched salvation we find in his name!” (JWA 1: 17: 4f, MW 187).

¹⁷ See Schury, Gudrun (2021), especially 31–33.

So Goethe's public humiliation of Jacobi was Jacobi's trigger to seek, with Lessing's admission of being a Spinozist, ammunition against Spinoza but *in the name of Spinoza's truth*. Jacobi talks of his thought as "my Spinoza–Antispinoza" (JWA 1: 274: 13).¹⁸ "It was of the highest importance to me that the spirit in which I had taken up the cause of Spinoza should be accurately perceived and that the issue was purely and solely one of speculative philosophy against speculative philosophy, or more correctly, *pure metaphysics against pure metaphysics*. And this should be understood in the authentic, not just the proverbial, sense of *in fugam vacui*" (JWA 1: 128: 14–20, MW 236). In taking up the cause of Spinoza, Jacobi's target was not only traditional Christian orthodoxy, but also traditional theism, the previous metaphysics in the tradition of Wolff, Leibniz, and Mendelssohn, *and* Spinoza's own rationalism. The Pantheism Dispute, unleashed by Jacobi's *Spinozabriefe*, changed philosophy forever.¹⁹

Spinoza's perfectly rational thought affirms in the end nothing but fatalism that implies that ideas of freedom and enlightenment operate in truth according to the "*order and interlocked machine of the human body*" (EIIp18sch). But that makes the idea of freedom "pure illusion" (JWA 1: 21: 16, MW 189), for which reason Jacobi had to become the *antithesis of Spinoza* (JWA 1: 21: 16, MW 189). Our conclusion will show that Jacobi, as the "gray eminence" of German idealism,²⁰ "the pivot of the spiritual *Bildung* of our time,"²¹ defends Spinoza because he represents *rational philosophy as such*. No philosophy prior to Spinoza's has been as rational as his. Precisely that

¹⁸ See Sandkaulen (2019b).

¹⁹ See on this Henrich (1992): 48–73. See Blumenberg (1979): 438–466.

²⁰ Theunissen (1996): 115.

²¹ Hegel, on March 26, 1819, writes to his friend Niethammer of hearing of Jacobi's death on March 10 of 1819. He says Jacobi was the "*Wendepunkt der geistigen Bildung der Zeit*" (Hoffmeister [1953], II: 213). Sandkaulen (see Sandkaulen [2000]: 7f) affirms Theunissen's judgment that Jacobi was the "gray eminence" of German idealism. The old image of Jacobi was that of a counter enlightener, or, at best, a gadfly who was a genius at working his way into the work of his opponents to disclose their limitations without adding anything original. This old image of Jacobi is in light of the massive new literature *by* and *about* Jacobi, not least the critical new edition of his works at Meiner and Frommann-Holzboog, as also his letters, no longer appropriate. The following testimonies of Jacobi's own time should suffice to attempt a correction of this traditional image. Fichte writes in the *Grundlage* of 1794 that Jacobi was "one of the greatest thinkers of our time" (Fichte, *Grundlage der Gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, vol. I of J. G. Fichte [1845–1846], 227). Toward the end of the difficult §4 of the *Zweite Einleitung* in die *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1797, which deals with the nature of Kant's thing in itself, Fichte calls Jacobi the "brightest thinker of his age" (Fichte, vol I of J. G. Fichte [1845–1846], 483). In his "Letter to Reinhold" of January 8, 1800 Fichte identifies Jacobi as "one of the deepest thinkers of our age (...) far above Kant" (Fichte's letter to Reinhold January 8, 1800 [Jaeschke [1993]: 65]. See Frank (1997): 81, Sandkaulen (2000): 28. Schelling praises Jacobi no less flatteringly. He pays tribute to Jacobi in his winter semester 1833/1834 "Lectures on the History of Modern Philosophy" at Munich—published posthumously—saying Jacobi is "probably the most instructive person in the whole history of modern philosophy" (SW I. 10, 168).

perfection, however, implies Spinoza's downfall, for it destroys and nullifies all that reason and Enlightenment²² are supposed to promote: freedom, individualism, and life. In the end, Jacobi concludes: "The positive aspect of Spinoza's system can be refuted without special effort; his explanation of the existence of finite things, of a successive world, is not only insufficient; it rests on an inner contradiction that can be proven" (JWA 1: 155: 29–33).²³

Spinoza's thought, expressed in his pivotal phrase *deus sive natura* (God or nature) revolutionized not only philosophy but also theology, literature, and the arts practically *overnight* when Jacobi published his *Spinozabriefe*.²⁴ But Jacobi showed and Hegel later reaffirmed that Spinoza is by no means *clearly* an atheist. Jacobi not only rejected him. He also admired him not only for his *rationalism* but also for his firm conviction in the *objectivity of truth*, which was his guiding light just as it was for Spinoza, the light that enlightens not only itself but also darkness (JWA 1: 28: 3–4, MW 193).²⁵ And the darkness that is enlightened is the "perfect skepticism" (JWA 1: 28: 1, MW 193) that motivates all good philosophy—such as Alan Burgh's, which Spinoza does admire despite his critique. Jacobi admired Spinoza for his "firm conviction" that is enlightened by truth and that is far removed from doubt: "Spinoza made a clear distinction between being certain and not doubting" (JWA 1: 27: 27f, MW 193).²⁶ For doubt is no more than *ισοσθένεια*, equanimity or indifference over against competing positions; *ισοσθένεια* is the highest principle of reflexive philosophy that permits equally valid positions related to each other in antinomies to stand as

²² With Schick (2019), we understand "enlightenment" as both an epoch within the history of philosophy—hence "Enlightenment"—as also as the "enlightening" work of all of that history. Spinoza's own *Opera* as well as Jacobi's revival of Spinoza are central to both meanings.

²³ See Sandkaulen (2000): 74, 76. See Timm (1971), Timm (1974). In both works, Timm correctly argues that the movement we identify today as "German idealism" achieved the opposite of what Jacobi had in mind with Spinoza. Jacobi (in the end) rejected Spinoza. Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel worked positively with Spinoza. But did Jacobi really reject Spinoza? He also affirmed Spinoza. Jacobi mentions repeatedly "my Spinoza–Antispinoza" (JWA 1: 274: 13). All of the great German idealists knew this. We must recognize that the movement we know today as "German idealism" became such an explosively complex movement, a movement that still inspires us today, because Jacobi did not only reject Spinoza. He also affirmed Spinoza. What follows helps uncover a small part of Jacobi's "Spinoza–Antispinoza." See Sandkaulen (2019b).

²⁴ We will refer to Jacobi's *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (*Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*) (1785, 1787, 2nd edition) either with the German word *Spinozabriefe* or with its English equivalent, *Letters on Spinoza*. Since the very beginning, it was a major publication. The characterization of Jacobi's *Spinozabriefe* as his *Spinozabüchlein* should be avoided.

²⁵ See Spinoza EIIP43sch: "*Verum est index sui et falsi* (Truth is the criterion of itself as also of the false)." To highlight the darkness, see Spinoza's letter to Alan Burgh of September 11, 1675, letter number 67.

²⁶ See Spinoza EIIP49sch.

absolutes. Because of this indifference, *isostheneia* differs from true skepsis: true skepsis unmasks the dogmatism of the antinomy within *isostheneia* by recognizing and demoting its dogmatism, thereby pointing to the relativity of the opposing positions that doubt had posited as insuperable absolutes.²⁷ True skepsis, that of Plato's *Parmenides* as well as of Spinoza, turns out to be the negative side of true philosophy, the *lux seipsam, et tenebras manifesta, sic veritas norma sui, et falsi* (the light that reveals itself as well as darkness, so truth is the criterion of itself as well as falsehood).²⁸ Because Jacobi emulates Spinoza's firm conviction of the light of truth but rejects Spinoza's anti-skeptical "perfect philosophy," he characterizes Spinoza as ultimately atheistic: "Spinozism is atheism" (JWA 1: 120: 19, MW 233).²⁹ And with Spinoza, he unmasked "transcendental idealism as nihilistic skepticism."³⁰ A quick non-answer to this puzzle is Jacobi's "Spinoza–Antispinoza" (JWA 1: 274: 13; see JWA 1: 128: 10–20, MW 236).³¹ Jacobi was, as mentioned, both a Spinozist *and* an Anti-Spinozist.³² To unravel this puzzle takes more time. It should be added that the question of whether Jacobi's Spinoza is true to the original is of course important. At the same time, it is clear, however, that the so-called "Spinoza revival," out of which emerged the three controversies on "pantheism," "atheism," and "theism," is based on

²⁷ See Hegel TWA 2: 230f, Vieweg (1999): 21f.

²⁸ See EIIp43sch and JWA 1: 28: 2–3, MW 193. See Hegel, Enz § 413 on the light "which manifests itself and the other" (TWA 10: 199; see also Enz § 172, TWA 8: 323). See on Jacobi and Hegel Baum (1976) and (1986) and (2000): 359: 11–14. See on this especially Peter Jonkers (2007a), (2007b). The statement that the "light enlightens itself" means *truth is self-evident, self-verifying* and requires no other means of verification, i.e., it is valid *immediately* or "in faith" *intuitively* prior to and outside of providing "sufficient grounds." Spinoza's corpus is suffused with just that thought. Im-mediate, i.e., *not mediated*, knowledge is *self-evident* knowledge that is *certain*, and we have it *prior* to any rational proof. Immediate certainty "not only needs no proof, but excludes all proofs absolutely, and is simply and solely *the representation itself agreeing with the thing represented*" (JWA 1: 115: 22–25, MW 230). See Spinoza EIIp43. See esp. EIIp43sch: "Who can know that he understands a thing unless he knows it *prius rem intelligat* (prior to knowing it)?" A "true idea" is the *adequate idea* EIIp43d. See Bowman (2004). See Melamed (2013). Jacobi's work is the root soil not only of Hegel's views on doubt and skepticism but also of the distinction between the *true* and the *false infinite*. Jacobi's true infinite, really identical to Spinoza's *substance*, is an early version of Hegel's *concept*, as Baum has shown in (1976). I point here only to two striking *verbal* parallels between Hegel and Jacobi: Jacobi talks of "*vollkommenen Skeptizismus* (perfect skepticism)" (JWA 1: 28: 1, MW 193), and Hegel of "*sich vollbringender Skepticismus* (skepticism that perfects itself)" (GW 9: 56: 12–13, TWA 3: 71, Enz 8, §78, § 413). The other parallel is Jacobi's and Spinoza's differentiation between "*certainty*" (with its twin brother of true skepticism) and "*not doubting*" (JWA 1: 27f, MW 193; see Spinoza EIIp49sch: *per certitudinem quid positivum intelligimus, non vero dubitationis privationem* [with certainty we understand something positive, not the absence of doubt]). See also EIIp43: "Whoever has a true idea knows that he has a true idea and cannot doubt its truth."

²⁹ Others before Jacobi have identified Spinoza as an atheist. I mention here only Christian Wolff (1737) especially 729, § 716. See also JWA 1: 386–388, commentary to JWA 1: 16–20.

³⁰ See Paul Franks (2012), see esp. 298–304. Jacobi puts into doubt the "*rationality of convictions as such*" (Franks [2012]: 315).

³¹ See Sandkaulen (2000): 13, 15, 24f, 30–33, Sandkaulen (2019): 15–31. Kahlefeld (2000): 30.

³² See Sandkaulen (2019b): 15–31. See Althof (2017): 11–43.

Jacobi's Spinoza.³³ Therefore, to claim that Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza is deficient because it is not true to Spinoza would be as fruitless as claiming that Spinoza's views are not valid because they do not conform to orthodox Jewish or Christian dogma and the Old and New Testaments. Jacobi's *Spinozabriefe* are— together with Spinoza—classical texts. Classical is today at least according to a dominant view of “classical” the whole movement which he inaugurated, often today called correctly *classical German philosophy*.³⁴

Jacobi's Spinoza is captured in his famous statement: “Spinozism is atheism” (JWA 1, 120: 19, MW 233).³⁵ It had and has consequences down to our own time.³⁶ Jacobi identified the position from which he engaged and criticized many others (mainly Spinoza, Fichte, and Schelling) with Archimedes' *δοξ μοι που στω* (*give me a place to stand*) (JWA 1: 1.6, MW 173). With that epithet, he seems to claim the eccentric freedom of having any position he pleases, at least in Kant's view,³⁷ a position he has “based not only on our *position* (*δοξ μοι που στω* [give me a place to stand]) but also on the *context of our actions* (*και κινησω την γην* [and I will move the world])” (JWA 1: 1: 6; MW 173; 218: 20-24). The kinetic will to *act* is pivotal. We are tempted to identify the vantage point from which Jacobi executes his many literary battles as a “theology of intuition.”³⁸ This is correct *if* we understand *intuition* and *faith* as the *certainty* provided by the *ἐν καὶ πᾶν* that inhabits any historically conditioned perspective moving people to *act* (JWA 1: 218: 20-24).³⁹ This perspective, identified

³³ Indicative of Jacobi's influence on the *modification* of Spinoza in German idealism is also at the very least Part VI of Jaeschke and Sandkaulen (2004): 301–355. Those modifications manifested themselves especially in Fichte and Hegel, as the essays by Schlösser (2004), Koch, Anton Friedrich (2004), and de Vos (2004) show.

³⁴ The Spinoza expert W. Bartuschat says that the interpretation of the German idealists (Jacobi, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel) of Spinoza is not true to Spinoza because this school “pursues a perspective which does not do justice to the basic idea of (Spinoza's) *Ethica*” (Bartuschat [2012]: 191). Specifically on Jacobi's *Unphilosophie* and its implications for traditional and “new” metaphysics (Hegel), see Bartuschat (2008): 213–215. Of course, there are various views on what characterizes *the classical*. See Allemann (1976). I find useful on this issue Stephan Grotz: The classical nature of a text—in our case Spinoza's texts and Jacobi's, Fichte's, Schelling's and Hegel's interpretation of them—consists in its potential for that multiplicity of interpretations which may not necessarily agree with the original or with each other but can be defended with reasonableness nonetheless. See Grotz (2004): 117. The explosive fireworks caused by the *Spinozabriefe*—Goethe's “explosion,” Hegel's “thunder-clap”—and of German idealism are so fascinating precisely because of that multiplicity of possible views, including also of Spinoza, a multiplicity that provides any interpreter with many different theories with which to work.

³⁵ See Sandkaulen (2000): 54.

³⁶ Just one example here, Wucherer-Huldenfeld (2015).

³⁷ Kant suggested Archimedes's fulcrum is Jacobi's “freedom.” See AA VIII: 403. The epithet was suggested by Hamann in his letter to Jacobi on November 14–15, 1784.

³⁸ Stiening (2021): 171.

³⁹ More on this in section 4 below, *Grounds of Certainty*.

correctly by Paul Franks as anti-skeptical “foundationalism” based on “indemonstrable matters of fact”⁴⁰ that we can identify with Boehm and Della Rocca as *brute facts*,⁴¹ must inevitably oppose any form of only *presumed* “certainty” expressed in a merely formal view of logic operating with the principle of sufficient reason, the PSR, the *logon didonai* (providing reasons), as that of Kant and most especially the Berlin rationalists such as Wieland, Biester, Nicolai, and others.⁴² Jacobi occupies a historically situated form of reason and action *in real life* that views rationalism as represented by Spinoza as problematic and destructive because of its abstraction,⁴³ because he considers Spinoza’s philosophy as the pinnacle of any philosophical system perspective: “There is no other philosophy than that of Spinoza” (JWA 1: 18: 2f, MW 187).⁴⁴ Jacobi feared rationalism’s abstractions since he “was eight or nine years old” and sought instead “*certainty* regarding the higher expectations of man” (JWA 1: 13: 15–21, MW 183, accent added).⁴⁵ Jacobi was derided as “irrational”⁴⁶ not only by Kant

⁴⁰ Franks (2008): 56f.

⁴¹ Della Rocca (2003): 75, Boehm (2016): 556. Both insist “there are no brute facts” (Della Rocca [2003]: 75). We suggest the reason Della Rocca and Boehm expel the notion of “brute facts” from their views of Spinoza has its roots in baggage inherited from Analytic Philosophy, specifically from G. E. M. Anscombe.

⁴² See Rühle (1989): 160f.

⁴³ See Kobusch (2012).

⁴⁴ See Kahlefeld (2000): 25, 33, 50–59.

⁴⁵ Supplement number III, JWA 1: 153–216 picks up the ridicule and denunciations Jacobi had to endure in the professional literature (Schlegel, Hegel) on account of his “faith” in *immediate* because of *self-verifying certainty* (Spinoza, EId3). We can be sure that Jacobi’s religious “higher expectations of man,” for which he fervently hoped, had an impact on the young theology students at the Tübingen Stift, namely, Hölderlin, Hegel, and Schelling. Hegel, full of Kant, Reinhold, and Fichte, writes from his “exile” as a tutor in Tschugg, Bern, Switzerland, to Schelling toward the end of January, 1795: “May the Kingdom of God come! Our hands must not rest idly in our lap!” Hoffmeister (1953): I: 18.

⁴⁶ Taylor considers Jacobi to be an “irrationalist” in Taylor (1975): 184, 421, 480. So also Pippin (1997): 6, 130. That is the older consensus that goes back at least as the work of Isaiah Berlin. That consensus really goes back to Jacobi’s own time. Crowe in his study of (2009) correctly disputes the critique of Jacobi as an irrationalist. He concedes the concept “irrationalism” is too “blunt” an instrument. He redefines Jacobi’s broader view of reason on “psychological” grounds, identifying the center of Jacobi’s personalism, which more correctly should be labeled a “metaphysic of personalism.” Crowe: “For Jacobi, the recognition that (Spinoza’s) rational explanation runs aground of human agency is a liberating discovery” (Crowe [2009]: 313). But that this “free human agency,” or “sense of moral agency,” (Crowe [2009]: 314 *et passim*) is rooted in Spinoza, is just barely recognized by Crowe, although he does quote Jacobi MW 193: “I love Spinoza” because free human agency, according to Spinoza, cannot be explained. Crowe’s key strength is the personalism and self-caused freedom he correctly attributes to Jacobi, although he seems to be unaware this personalism is *also* rooted in Spinoza, see e.g. EId1, EId3, not only Spinoza’s fatalism. He explains Jacobi’s personalism and the “higher life” that leads to the encounter with God. That Jacobi understands the *life* of that inner agency of the person as “reason” is not so clear. Crowe asks: “Does reason play a role in this process? Jacobi does not say” (Crowe [2009]: 316). But Jacobi does say: “This is human reason that the existence of God is more clearly revealed to and certain for him than his own existence” (JWA 3: 10: 16–17). Jacobi considers “the principle of reason to be one with the principle of life” (JWA 2: 65:1–2, MW 301). Human life consists of “*the One and Only reason!*” and since this *One and Only Reason* “is pure reason, a perfection of life,” it is “in the strictest sense identical with *Ἐν καὶ πᾶν*” (JWA 6: 228: 7–10, MW 488). In short, Crowe does not recognize Jacobi’s unmasking of the *dialectic of reason* as grounds for a

and Berlin enlighteners such as Biester⁴⁷ and Nicolai, but also by Friedrich Schlegel, the young Hegel, and many, many others. However, the movement we today identify as classical German philosophy would nonetheless never have become possible because it is based precisely on those “expectations of a better world” and a new, better form of reason, the *logos apophantikos*, the *God-negating word*, i.e., the negative theology whose light enlightens, verifying not only itself⁴⁸ but also throwing a clear light on the inadequacies of rationalism (EIIp43sch, JWA 1: 115: 18–116: 4, MW 231).⁴⁹ Jacobi found Spinoza to be the most articulate proponent of that inferior form of rationality. And so we are confronted with Jacobi’s “Spinoza–Antispinoza” (JWA I: 274: 13).

3) Beginning: Spinoza, Jacobi, Kant

During their conversation in July 1780, Lessing asks Jacobi: “What do you hold for the spirit of Spinozism?” Jacobi replies: “It is certainly nothing other than the ancient *a nihilo nihil fit* (nothing comes from nothing)” (JWA 1: 18: 1–9, MW 187). That means: Everything has a cause.

To understand what that means, let’s concentrate on those manuscripts that made their way into the final texts (JWA 1: 92: 1–112: 17, MW 216–228). In these, Jacobi characterizes in forty-six paragraphs his “exposition of Spinoza’s system” (JWA 1: 93: 1–6, MW 216). If we concentrate on those paragraphs, we note how frequently he refers in footnotes to Spinoza, mainly his *Ethics* but also to his other writings, e.g., letters and posthumous writings. We need to pay attention to both Spinoza and Jacobi’s exposition of Spinoza. If we do that, what becomes clear is that Jacobi here exposes Spinoza’s thought to Spinoza’s own “subtext” behind his text.⁵⁰ What becomes clear is the *revolutionary* implication of Jacobi’s reconstruction of Spinoza,

dialectic of enlightenment from the perspective of a *higher* form of reason (Jaeschke [2004]). And it is not clear that both that higher form of reason, which is identical with life, personal and free human agency, as also the rationalism that is the target of Jacobi’s critique, are rooted in Spinoza.

⁴⁷ See Biester’s letter to Kant of June 11, 1786, letter number 375, AA X: 453ff. Biester identifies Jacobi as “undermining and mocking any rational knowledge of God, and praising, indeed, almost deifying Spinoza’s incomprehensible nonsense” (Ibid., 454). That Jacobi is identified as a Spinozist not only by Biester but also by the literary elite needs to be highlighted.

⁴⁸ Jacobi’s self-verifying *logos apophantikos in se est, et per se concipitur, cujus conceptus no indiget conceptu alterius rei, a quo formari debeat* (is in and is conceived through itself whose concept does not need the concept of any other thing from which to be formed) (Spinoza EId3).

⁴⁹ See Bowman (2004): 168f, Vieweg (1999): 162, Kobusch (2012): 251, Jonkers (2007a): 207.

⁵⁰ I follow here Sandkaulen’s analysis (2000): 98, 99. Oliver Koch’s views on and exposition of Jacobi follow just this strategy in “Jacobi’s Reconstruction of Spinoza,” where he points to “Basic Metaphysical Relationships in (Jacobi’s) Spinoza” (Koch [2013]: 48–55).

implications for traditional assumptions in metaphysics, theism, anthropology, logic, and ethics. The “soul” or “spirit” of Spinoza’s thought is not the “*formula method*,” the “formulary method of the geometers” (JWA 1: 56: 16–20),⁵¹ but rather the “ancient *a nihilo nihil fit* (from nothing comes nothing)” (JWA 1: 56: 16–58: 12, MW 204–205).⁵² It is the *principle of sufficient reason*.⁵³ It “denies a beginning to any action whatever” (JWA 1: 57: 24f, MW 205).⁵⁴ Spinoza’s PSR, *a nihilo nihil fit*, implies, in Della Rocca’s words, “there are no brute facts,”⁵⁵ i.e., there are no *unexplained* facts, and the rational interconnectedness, i.e., the *mechanism* of explanation, *idem est* (is identical) to the causal interconnectedness, i.e., *mechanism* of reality (EIIp7). For truth *flees vacuity* (*in fugam vacui*) (JWA 1: 128: 19f, MW 236; JWA 2: 215: 4f., MW 519).⁵⁶ This means: Any action must be caused by something else—although, we need to note, Spinoza’s *substance is immediately evident* “*in itself and is conceived* (i.e., caused by) *itself, i.e., substance does not require, (indiget), another concept to be formed*” (EId3). So not requiring explication, it is a *brute fact*.⁵⁷ Therefore, according to Spinoza, an uncaused

⁵¹ Essentially Jacobi correctly observes that not *geometry* but the PSR is the heart of Spinoza. See Beiser (1987): 85, 108, Kahlefeld (2000): 31, Sandkaulen (2000): 94, Koch (2013): 48.

⁵² See Sandkaulen (2000): 98, Beiser (1987): 85, 108, Kahlefeld (2000): 31, Koch, O. (2013): 48f. *et passim*.

⁵³ See the excellent essay on this issue by Michael Della Rocca (2012). The connection between reason, nothing, and existence (or nonexistence) is central to this essay. Also, Omri Boehm points in his essay (2016) to the centrality of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) in Kant as the basis of his attack on metaphysics. See also Della Rocca (2003). Boehm and Della Rocca argue persuasively how and why in Spinoza as well as in Kantian thought the PSR is central. What is often lacking is an appreciation of Jacobi’s influence on Kant through his rehabilitation of Spinoza as well as their personal, direct correspondence with each other as well as the indirect correspondence through others, such as Hamann. When did Kant begin reading the “dead dog” Spinoza? Boehm suggests Spinoza was important to Kant from the very beginning. In his (2011) essay, Boehm suggests, contrary to common assumptions, that Kant was familiar—through Wolff and Leibniz—with Spinoza from the time of his precritical period to his critical writings, *Lectures on Metaphysics* and the posthumous *Reflections*. However, in note 4 on p. 684, he writes: “It is important to note that these passages (where the name Spinoza appears) occur *after* the first edition of the KrV.” It is clear that Kant’s more serious discussion of Spinoza after 1781 was influenced by Jacobi’s *Spinozabriefe*. That Kant discusses Spinoza openly in his writings only *after* the first edition of the KrV is no coincidence. That first edition appeared in 1781. Jacobi’s *Spinozabriefe* appeared in 1785. Jacobi discussed Kant *and* Spinoza intensely in his *Spinozabriefe* and in his *David Hume* of 1787 and obviously Kant took note. Suddenly Spinoza rose from the dead.

⁵⁴ See Sandkaulen (2000): 96–99, Koch, O. (2013): 48–51.

⁵⁵ Della Rocca (2003): 75. Also, Boehm argues that *with* Kant’s PSR “there are no brute facts” (Boehm [2016]: 556). But that implies *against* Kant that his idea that existence is not a real predicate must be false. Boehm shows how Kant’s “is/ought distinction” comes to rescue Kant out of this pickle. What we miss is the central issue here, namely that Kant’s transcendental *a priori* will work only on the basis of the *a posteriori* assumption of “the thing in itself as something actual for itself but uncognized by us” (KrV B xx). Jacobi has shown (JWA 2: 267: 9–37) that Kant’s transcendentalism is tied up in “truly *unspseakable* contradictions” (JWA 2: 112: 14, MW 338) of having to *assume*, i.e. not really knowing, an *idealistic* transcendental subject in order to be able to realize the appearance of a “thing in itself,” behind which lies a no less fictitious *materialism*.

⁵⁶ See Kahlefeld (2000): 32f.

⁵⁷ Brutish immediacy can for Jacobi only be *intuited* or *believed*. The question of the relationship of substance to thought, “souls” or individuality to body or material, pops up early in the discussions

development does not exist. This implies that Spinoza already operated with the abstract hiatus between immediacy and mediation, which is later achieved in Hegel's *Aufhebung*, into the concept in such a way that brutish factual immediacy is indeed the beginning of logical thought—"unmittelbar and *Unmittelbarkeit* (not justified) immediacy represent *Ursprungsdenken* (originating thought) in the second half of the 18th century"⁵⁸—but is now negated or mediated in order to be conceptualized (Hegel Enz 1830, §§ 61-78, TWA 8: 148-168.).⁵⁹ Jacobi tended to abstractly oppose brutish immediacy and conceptual mediation. But he saw that abstract opposition in Spinoza. Spinoza, according to Jacobi, argued "that with each and every coming-to-be in the infinite, no matter how one dresses it up in images, with each and every change in the infinite *something* is posited *out of nothing*." But the "soul" of Spinoza's principle *a nihilo nihil fit* prohibits such origination in infinity. Jacobi summarizes: "He therefore rejected any *transition* from the infinite to the finite. In general, he rejected all *causae transitoriae, secundariae, or remotae*, and in place of an emanating *En-soph* he only posited an *immanent* one, an indwelling cause of the universe eternally unalterable within itself" (JWA 1: 18: 9–20; MW 187f).⁶⁰ According to Jacobi, Spinoza sees origination as an *infinitely* recurring process *within* reality. Since, therefore, a sufficient ground is missing in infinity for such a change to occur, not "something" but "nothing comes from nothing" (*a nihilo nihil fit*). But as Spinoza's "immediate mode of substance," substance's "immediately eternal mode" of pure thought, truth, and light, in which is expressed the "general, *eternal, unchangeable* form of singular things" (*sub specie aeternitatis*) (JWA 1:252:29–35, 253:5–12. MW

between Lessing and Jacobi at the Wolfenbüttel library. Jacobi suggests: "This great knot (...) he (i.e., Spinoza) left it just as tangled as it was." Lessing replies: "I won't leave you be; you must clarify this parallelism. (...) Yet people always speak of Spinoza as if he were a dead dog still" (JWA 1: 27: 2–7, MW 193). The "parallelism" to which Lessing refers is expressed in EIIp7: *Ordo et connexio idearum idem est, ac ordo, et connexio rerum* (The order and interrelationship of ideas is identical to the order and interconnection of things). Lessing suggests with Jacobi this "parallelism" has resuscitated the dead dog. Spinoza himself clarifies that "parallelism" in many places, see e.g., EIIId4: "I understand an *adequate idea* as that idea insofar as it, seen without reference to the object, has all attributes or intrinsic properties of a true idea." He adds in the *Explicatio*: "I say *intrinsic attributes* to exclude what is extrinsic." Clearly Spinoza has in mind what we today call *common sense* and Jacobi affirms just this. See Bowman (2004). See Ahlers (2007).

⁵⁸ Arndt (2001): 236, my emphasis. See also Arndt (1994), see esp. 97–103 on "1. Amphibolie der *Unmittelbarkeit*," (Ambiguity of Immediacy) (Jacobi). The only point of protest we must register here is that Jacobi's "common-sense" philosophy, basic to his *immediate, not mediated knowing*, should be traced to Spinoza, not Thomas Reid. See for that argument Bowman (2004). Bowman convincingly showed that Jacobi discovered Reid only after he had already developed his philosophy of immediate, intuitive knowing based on Spinoza.

⁵⁹ On the topic "Jacobi–Hegel," as also "system vs. critique of system," I owe much to Althof (2017).

⁶⁰ See Koch, (2013): 50f, Sandkaulen (2000): 96–99.

370), is the origin of change, time and real experience never really happen but are always from eternity and exist *simultaneously as concepts of reason* and are thus mere abstract “imagination” by which we have “cleansed”⁶¹ what we know of everything “empirical” (JWA 1: 253: 16–254: 2, MW 370f). This eternal self-reproduction without a real beginning or end is in Hegel’s words in his *Logic* of 1812/13 no more than a “*finite infinite*,” the “*schlechte Unendliche* (bad infinite)”⁶² that in truth changes nothing and is a vacuous “progress into infinity” (TWA 5: 155, GW 11: 81). “The progress into infinity is therefore nothing but the repetitive indifference, one and the same *langweilige* (boring) change between this temporality and infinity” (Hegel, GW 11: 80: 5, 81: 25, TWA 5: 155). This *isosthenia* (eternal identity) is destructive skepsis that *annihilates* (JWA 1: 216: 19, MW 362).⁶³ The finite is in Spinoza abstract and infinite: both are really identical. Hegel with Jacobi: “*This infinity is itself finite*” (GW

⁶¹ See Schick (2019): 229.

⁶² Hegel talks here about the “*abstrakte Nichtsein des Quantums überhaupt, die schlechte Unendlichkeit* (the *abstract Nothing* of the quantum, the bad infinity).” It is the “*bad or negative infinity*” because of the “tedious” *eternal progression ad infinitum*. (Enz § 94 supplement, TWA 8: 199, § 93) DiGiovanni translates Hegel’s “*Langweiligkeit*” and “*langweilig*” with “tediousness,” “tedious,” which is ok but lacks the temporal element “-*weile*” in “*Langeweile*,” which not only Jacobi but also the general usage intend: *Langweiligkeit* is in truth completely abstract, *unbearable, depressing, eternal time* and therefore *lack of all temporality*. *Langweiligkeit* is Jacobi’s oxymoron “eternal time,” i.e., no time at all. The cultural phenomenon of *Langweiligkeit* in early German Romanticism is of profound significance on which we cannot elaborate here. The eternal time of *Langweiligkeit* contrasts with the “*wahrhafte Unendlichkeit (true infinity)*” Enz 1830 § 95, which is identical with philosophy as such because it contains the unity of opposites in such a way that it opposes opposition *as such* while retaining them as part within the whole in such a way that the whole is contained *within* each concrete part. That is a deeply Spinozistic thought. The concepts “good” or “true infinity” and “bad infinity” occur for the first time *together* in the *Jena Logic* written during the latter half of 1804. See GW 7: 29: 11. Simple relation is in “*Wahrheit Unendlichkeit (true infinity)*,” and “*schlechte Unendlichkeit (bad infinity)*” (GW 7: 29). The term “bad infinity” appears here for the first time in *any* of Hegel’s writings. Jacobi is the originator of those terms *and of their content*. Jacobi not only knew the “bad infinity” or “negative infinity” (JWA 3:105:3) of *total vacuity* or “*eternal time*” (JWA 1: 251, 254, 257), but also his main concern was constantly focused on the “true infinite,” which is ultimately identical for him with *reason as such*. For Jacobi, *good infinity* is God, conceptually ungraspable (JWA 2: 210: 31–211: 2) *and therefore* infinitely real because this deity provides measure and determinateness and therefore concreteness of what we could call with Della Rocca *brute*, i.e., preconceptual *factuality*: “*determinatio est negatio*” (JWA 1: 22: 24, MW 190; JWA 100: 3, MW 219f.) With reference to Spinoza Gb posth. 558, see Hegel Enz 1830 § 91 suppl, TWA 8: 196: “*omnis determinatio est negatio* says Spinoza” (EL 147). Manfred Baum is correct when he says: “The origin of his (i.e., Hegel’s) contrasting of the two forms of infinity and pointing to their contrasting relationship stand in a context that has been determined primarily by Jacobi’s critique of rationalistic philosophy in view of Spinoza’s paradigm” (Baum [1976]: 90). Hegel speaks Jacobi’s language when he emphasizes: “Insofar as human beings want to be real, they must exist in the real world. To truly live in it they must limit themselves. Those (Early Romantics) who are nauseated by real-world finitude never gain true humanity but are snuffed out by abstractness” (Enz § 92 supplement, TWA 8: 197, EL 148, rendition modified). Hegel goes on saying that this *true* humanity is internally conflicted and therefore “dialectical” because the *truly* finite is not truly infinite, i.e., not of infinite, *absolute* value: It contains negativity within itself. Jacobi’s *critique* of Spinoza’s eternally recurring *finitude* as not really reaching true infinity is the root-bed of Hegel’s comment that the bad infinite is internally conflicted and hence “dialectical” in nature, containing its own destruction.

⁶³ Ten years later, the term *Vernichtung* (annihilation) takes center stage in Jacobi’s *Letter to Fichte* of 1799. See Nisenbaum (2018) on Jacobi’s introduction of nihilism to the debate.

11: 81: 26).⁶⁴ Jacobi's critique of Spinoza's immediate identification of reason with reality was the midwife of the speculative view of system of German idealism⁶⁵ because the idea of *an infinite succession of finite things* "rests on an obvious internal contradiction" (JWA 1: 155: 32f; JWA 1: 174: 17f)⁶⁶ and so "contradicts itself" (JWA 1: 19: 10, 20: 9, MW 188f), being conflicted with itself, and is therefore "the height of absurdity" (JWA 1: 72: 13, MW 209). In Hegel's language, this construct of the finite is "dialectical" in nature.⁶⁷ The emerging German idealists took note. Schelling, confronted with Jacobi's analysis of Spinoza, wrote in the seventh of his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* of 1795, after having quoted Jacobi's exact words: "I do not think that the spirit of Spinoza could be captured better" (SW I.5, 313).

Jacobi's work on the coincidence of infinity and determinate temporality in Spinoza was read in the context of Kant's work on these identical issues, specifically Kant's arguments in the first antinomy of reason on the question of whether the world does or does not have a beginning. Kant's antithetical theses in the first antinomy are in Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza not really opposing each other. They necessarily *complement* each other and are operating together: *beginning* determination and mediation coexist, indeed, they operate *together with* absolute substance's *immediacy* so that this immediacy is the presupposition of the chain of determination. This complementary *both and* is well expressed in the Latin phrase for the PSR, the positive version of *a nihilo nihil fit* (from nothing comes nothing): *becoming*, expressed in the *fit*, implies *annihilation or nothing*. Spinoza's unchangeable, eternal substance originates everything *immediately*. Jacobi therefore characterizes "the principle issue, the doctrine of Spinoza itself" with these words: "At the ground of every becoming there must lie a being that has not itself become; at the ground of every coming-to-be, something that has not come-to-be; at the ground of anything alterable, an unalterable and eternal thing" (JWA 1: 93: 1–10, MW 216f). He points out that Spinoza's "doctrine"

⁶⁴ Hegel's "*wahre Unendlichkeit (true infinite)*" (GW 11: 82: 32) is however contained in the *Wechselbestimmung* alteration (or alternating determination) between the finite and the infinite, which *in themselves* have no truth: "*In der That aber ist in diesem herüber—und hinübergehenden Wechselbestimmen die Wahrheit dieses Unendlichen schon enthalten*" (GW 11: 82: 3f.). See Hegel SL 108–112 on alternating determination of finite and infinite.

⁶⁵ Rühle (1989): 162. Rühle is very helpful in pointing to Jacobi's profound influence especially on Hegel, but also on the origination of the whole movement we today call German idealism.

⁶⁶ See Sandkaulen (2000):74, 76.

⁶⁷ Hegel Enz § 92 supplement: [We find that this infinitely finite] "contains in itself a contradiction and thus proves itself to be dialectical" (TWA 8: 197). How closely Hegel follows Jacobi's train of thought is striking. Both often use the identical terminology like "internally contradicted" but Jacobi does not use the terms "dialectic" or "dialectical."

contains the skeptical element of the *not* both cognitively and ontologically. Ontological origination implies negating *nothing* to arrive at *something* while the cognitive system that Spinoza articulates as *absolute determination* is “easily refuted” in Hegel’s and Jacobi’s words by pointing to the fact that *determination* refutes *absoluteness*, for within it all that is determined becomes thereby dependent on other dependents and is not absolute. Spinoza’s *a nihilo nihil fit* forces us to assume an infinite chain of determinants without any beginning *as also* an originating beginning *immediately* in every member of that chain.⁶⁸

So if Jacobi’s analysis of Spinoza is correct, it undercuts Kant’s first form of his antinomy of reason, which pits the *thesis* against the *antithesis* that reason requires for *heuristic* reasons: “The world has a beginning in time, and in space it is also enclosed in boundaries.” The *antithesis*: “The world has no beginning and no bounds in space but is infinite with regard to both time and space” (KrV A 426f).⁶⁹ For the reasons mentioned, Jacobi, following his analysis of Spinoza, considered this antithetical thesis and antithesis of Kant’s first antinomy as “most thoughtless and foolish” (JWA 1: 264: 25). For a determining *beginning* is impossible to assume to arise out of *indeterminacy*, i.e., in Kant’s language, out of an “infinite series of states of things in the world” in the *thesis* (KrV A 426). It is pure “indeterminate immediacy” in the first section on *Quality* of Hegel’s major *Logic* (TWA 5: 82, SL 59). But because this pure immediacy cannot be thought, Jacobi rightly observes it is “contradictory” to think it (JWA 1: 263: 30f).⁷⁰ Therefore Hegel later observes “this indeterminate immediacy is indeed *nothing* and neither more nor less than nothing” (TWA 5: 83, SL 59). But the opposite *antithesis* of complete vacuity and lack of all determinacy, that is, of *pure nothing*, is just as contradictory: we cannot assume the world began *immediately* without any mediation (JWA 1: 263: 33–264: 7). Hegel later correctly observes in 1812/13: “Nothing is therefore the identical determination or rather

⁶⁸ Hegel (1801) *Differenzschrift*, TWA 2: 36. Hegel says here that Spinoza’s claim “contains its (skeptical) denial within itself, *entails its nullity*” (Hegel [1977a]: 103). The absolute is relative, which is contradictory to *Verstand* (understanding). But the absolute also acts *immediately* in each member, so “*Vernunft* (reason) unites these contradictions, posits both simultaneously and therefore overcomes, sublates them.” Koch correctly refers to Hegel’s “*verstecktes Lob* (hidden praise)” of Jacobi’s critique of Spinoza *together with* Kant’s critique of reason in the *Differenzschrift*. See Koch, O. (2013): 51 and note 28. See Vieweg (1999): 155ff. See Ahlers (1975).

⁶⁹ See for this point Koch, O. (2013): 50f.

⁷⁰ See Eckl (2015a), Eckl (2015b).

indeterminacy and therefore altogether the same as pure *being*” (TWA 5: 83, SL 59).⁷¹ Jacobi identifies the first Kantian antinomy thus:

The question whether the world had a beginning (*thesis*) or had no beginning (*antithesis*) is really one and the same thing, if we take origination or beginning seriously; for the world had otherwise both begun and also not begun. The same goes for the other possibility (*antithesis*), where the world has *begun* in infinity, which means, it has *not* begun and yet has begun. So we do not have here *two assertions that contradict each other*, so as to destroy each other; rather, the contradiction lies within each thesis and antithesis and it is in truth only one *contradiction which inheres in both*, which is completely overcome through insight into its source. (JWA 1: 264:23-35)⁷²

The source is both profound and trivial. For the contradiction does not lie in reality but *only* in our intellectual approach to reality: The conflict lies in Kant’s own “solution,” “transcendental idealism,” which Hegel characterizes as “one of the most important and profound advances in philosophy of recent times” while simultaneously criticizing this step as finding the solution in “thinking reason *alone*,” not in reality (Enz 1830 §48 addition, SL 93). Hegel’s critique of *abstract thought* is connected to Jacobi’s identical critique.⁷³

Jacobi suggests that Kant’s critique of metaphysics is rooted in Spinoza.⁷⁴ But, as we shall see, this point *connecting* Kant and Jacobi contrasts sharply with what *separates* them: the *proton pseudos* (chief error) of Kant’s *pure reason*, which constitutes the “*personal existence*” of Kant’s “higher degree of consciousness” common to all living beings that attempt to enhance their life’s chances of survival (JWA 1: 159: 17–21, MW 342).⁷⁵ “*Sensing (in the sense of taking hold) is the root of reason.—Pure reason is a taking hold that only takes hold of itself. Or again: Pure*

⁷¹ See Theunissen (1970): 42–46.

⁷² See Sandkaulen (2000): 138, Koch, O. (2013): 51 and note 28, Kahlefeld (2000): 71.

⁷³ See Halbig (2005).

⁷⁴ Jacobi: “The following quotations from Kant are written altogether in the spirit of Spinoza” (JWA 1: 96: 3, 97: 33, MW 218). Jacobi continues quoting from the KrV A 25 and A 32 on the necessary *priority* of space and time. Neither can a partial *space* nor a partial *time* precede the whole in such a way that their summation would achieve singular wholeness. Kant says the whole precedes the parts. The key principle of Spinoza Jacobi stresses is the statement in EI p13: *Totum parte prius esse necesse est* (the whole necessarily precedes the parts).

⁷⁵ Stolzenberg (2004): 21f and Dahlstrom (2008b).

reason only takes hold of itself” (JWA 2: 201: 5–8, MW 507, rendition modified).⁷⁶ This is a *practical, personalist* issue. Kant’s *pure reason* and Fichte with Kant advocate an “*impersonal person*” because they have *cleansed*, i.e., *annihilated*, the real person in favor of *pure reason* (JWA 2: 212: 1, MW 516f).⁷⁷ For the *mechanism* of pure reason “annihilates” thought (JWA 2: 229–231, MW 528–530).⁷⁸ We will turn to that interpretation of Kant, based on Spinoza, immediately. I refer here only to Spinoza E IV *On Human Bondage*.⁷⁹ Stolzenberg is correct that Jacobi interprets Kant here.⁸⁰ But because Stolzenberg and Dahlstrom do not see this connection between Jacobi and Spinoza,⁸¹ both misunderstand the nature and nuances of Jacobi’s massive influence on the movement we today identify as German idealism. He shows that that thrust toward *purity* is reason’s own *basic drive, Begierde*, toward self-identity and self-preservation.⁸² The *purser* Kant’s reason the *purser* its will “*to preserve itself*” (JWA 1: 76: 27, MW 211).⁸³ I should not have to mention the influence of Kant *and Jacobi* on Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Jacobi is emphatically neither a “theist” nor a Kantian. He is at best *half-Kantian*—he did, after all, agree with Kant on the issue of the incomprehensibility of freedom—despite his life-long admiration of Kant, which he expressed not only to Kant himself but also to all his friends and in all of his writings in which he debated Kant.⁸⁴ This admiration is based on Jacobi’s conviction that Kant’s *pure reason* is next to Spinoza’s one of the most sophisticated life-form ever developed: it provides the best forms of survival. Jacobi considered Kant’s form of knowing *tightly conditioned knowledge*, each argument based on previous arguments, which rejected any form of not-knowing the absolute as personal as nothing but

⁷⁶ See Waibel (2012b): 18f.

⁷⁷ See Schick (2019): 211ff.

⁷⁸ Jacobi quotes Kant himself from his second *Critique* of 1788, AA V, 97 to the effect that the mechanism of thinking is in effect an *automaton materiale* similar to the “*Freiheit eines Bratenwenders*,” the “*freedom of a turnspit*.”

⁷⁹ See JWA 1: 158–162; JWA 2: 243–246, MW 341–344.

⁸⁰ Stolzenberg (2004): 19f.

⁸¹ Jacobi thinks Kant cleanses reason of all impurities to achieve an abstract identity with itself. “In this reduction of morality to abstract unity the pinnacle of one aspect of Spinozist rationality manifests itself in the name of practical reason in which speculative reason should become adequate to itself” (Schick [2019]: 229).

⁸² Schick (2019): 229f. See JWA 1: 76: 21–32, MW 211; JWA 1: 161: 26–30, MW 343. See Sandkaulen (2000): 77, 113, 128, 223–226.

⁸³ Jacobi’s argument is based on Spinoza, see EIIIp6, EIIIp7.

⁸⁴ And Kant coveted Jacobi’s good will. In his letter to Kleuker of Oct. 13, 1788, Jacobi writes: “Kant very much pressed the young Hamann asking him repeatedly whether I really think highly of him and whether I harbor no hostile sentiments against him and appealing to him most emphatically to convey to me his highest regards of me” (Ratjen [1842]: 119).

Schwärmerei.⁸⁵ But thereby Kant's thought stays for Jacobi outside of the gates of certainty.

4) Grounds of Certainty

Contrary to Kant, Jacobi argues for a robust form of knowing on grounds of “the most sacred certainty” (JWA 2: 211: 13f, MW 519; JWA 2: 404: 20–28, MW 564f)⁸⁶ in the not knowable unconditioned *as the criterion of all rational proving*. Rationality requires a criterion of validation. For if knowing means providing grounds, we are faced with an infinite regress of grounding that ultimately implies ignorance *unless* we *presuppose* the not knowable unconditioned as valid.⁸⁷ If all arguments are no more than *mechanistically* grounded, each argument being grounded in a preceding argument *ad infinitum*, essentially the PSR, then our knowledge has no validity *unless* it is grounded in some authority outside of the infinite chain of mediating argumentation, i.e., in *immediacy*. Jacobi makes exactly that claim: We *must* presuppose an unconditioned authority that we can only *feel, believe, intuit, and assume*. Only the assumption of something *not* demonstrable and unconditioned validates all demonstration and conditioned knowledge.⁸⁸

My dear Mendelssohn, we are all born in faith, and we must remain in faith, just as we are all born in society, and must remain in society. *Totum parte prius esse necesse est (the whole is necessarily prior to the parts)*.—How can we strive for certainty unless we are already acquainted with certainty in advance, and how can we be acquainted with it except through something that we already discern with certainty? This leads to the concept of immediate certainty, which

⁸⁵ Friedrich Schlegel's formulation expresses this issue: “*Knowing* describes *conditioned* knowledge. That means the not-knowability of the absolute is an identical triviality” (KFSA XVIII 511, number 64, quoted from Frank [1997]: 663).

⁸⁶ Jacobi argues here for exclusive certainty based on the intellectually not mediated priority of the unconditioned that is known by or through the *spirit* which contrasts with the conditioned knowledge of the *letter* of science. See also JWA 2: 424: 11–30, MW 582. The *letter-spirit* duality, prioritizing spiritual priority, is famous not only in biblical studies but in all literature. Jacobi advocates “*a spirit certain of itself* who guides into all truth *immediately*” (JWA 2: 404: 3, MW 565). Doing so he alludes to Psalm 51:12 where the psalmist requests a “steadfast spirit” and to John 16:13, where John talks of “the Spirit of truth who will guide you into all the truth.” Such allusions are not a sign of irrational *Schwärmerei* as some suggest. Such biblical references are rather indicative of *Platonism in Christianity* (Beierwaltes [2001]), *Christian Philosophy* [Kobusch 2006] and altogether the *rationality of theology in the origins of Christian theology* (Dalferth [2001]): 3–58. The topic of religion is unavoidable in Jacobi. It is the same for Fichte and Christianity. See Asmuth (1999): 123–152.

⁸⁷ See Frank (1997): 664ff.

⁸⁸ Not only for Jacobi, also for Kant the idea of the *unconditioned* is pivotal, although differently. I cannot pursue this issue here. See Onnasch (2001)

not only needs no proof, but excludes all proofs absolutely, and is simply and solely *the representation itself agreeing with the thing being represented*. Convictions by proofs is second-rate certainty (JWA 1: 115: 15–26, MW 230)⁸⁹ (...) Every proof presupposes something already proven, the principle of which is *Revelation*. (JWA 1: 124: 1–3, MW 234)

For Jacobi “(f)aitth is the element of all certainty” (JWA 1: 125:1f., MW 234).⁹⁰ The *certainty* of that not-knowing “faith” is ultimately the σιδεροῖς καὶ ἄδαμάντινοις λόγοις (*grounds of iron and steel*) in Plato’s Gorgias 509a, which Socrates asserts as *indubitable apodicticity* although “not known”, i.e., known by *providing reasons*, λόγον διδόναι (*providing reasons*), the PSR. That *believed certainty* must precede justifying grounds as theology, which knows the *certainty* of “free grace,” must precede impotent “justification through works”: Man is justified by *faith* and not by *works* (Rom 3: 28). Works and instrumental reason manage a world that is available to us, a world that *always* suffers from relativity and the vicissitudes of the *factual* that is instrumentally *manufactured*. Through our rationalizations, “a world of reason arises in which signs and words take the place of real substances and forces. We appropriate the universe by tearing it apart” (JWA 1: 249: 17–19, MW 370).⁹¹

Hegel picked up this Early Romantic idea in his fragments on *Morality, Love and Religion* of 1797/98, arguing that “*Begreifen ist beherrschen (grasping intellectually means domination)*” (TWA 1: 242). In *Glauben und Wissen, Faith and Knowledge* of 1802, he continues in just this Jacobian track: it is through reason’s abstractions that “it turns the beautiful into things, the *Hain zu Hölzern (the grove into timber)*, images into things that have eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear” (GW 4: 317: 20–23, Hegel [1977b]: 58). With this last metaphor, Hegel picked up Jacobi’s comments from *Allwill* of 1792: through *Verstand* “we hear with our ears nothing but our *own ears*, see with eyes nothing but our *own eyes*” (JWA 6: 160: 27–30, MW 438). In contrast, Jacobi insists that only that which is *removed* from and lies *beyond* our grasp has truth and *public validity*.⁹² In his *Denkbücher*, he writes: “All

⁸⁹ See EIp1: “Substantia prior est natura suis affectionibus (substance precedes its affects).” See Horstmann (1991): 63f. Horstmann is wrong, insisting that Jacobi’s grounds of certainty in *faith* and *revelation* are “anti-rational.” To the contrary, Jacobi’s philosophy of immediacy and faith is humanity’s “principle of life” “which simultaneously presents itself as the principle of all reason” (JWA 1: 263: 15f.). See to this correctly Sandkaulen (1995): 420 and 9n.

⁹⁰ See Zöller (1998).

⁹¹ See Rühle (1989).

⁹² See Kobusch (2012), see esp. 248.

knowing through proof must be preceded by knowledge prior to proof” (Jacobi [2020b]: 405). “We do not first have to look for the unconditioned; on the contrary, we have the same certainty about its existence as we have about our own *conditioned* one, or indeed, an even greater certainty” (JWA 1: 260: 9–14, MW 375). Fichte, following Jacobi, says exactly the same: “All proving originates in something unproven.”⁹³ That realm of the *unconditioned* is tied to the realm of *conditions*. “The union of the necessity of nature and freedom in one and the same being is an absolutely incomprehensible fact; a *miracle* and a *mystery* comparable to creation” (JWA 2: 234: 20–23; MW 530). To further explain this view, Jacobi wrote to Kant on Nov. 16, 1789:

I assert a connection between the sensual and supra-sensual, a connection that is to humanity just as evident as it is incomprehensible. It is a connection between the natural and supra-natural that arranges a solution to reason’s apparent contradiction with itself as soon as it is sensed and recognized as certain. Just as all that is conditioned ultimately relates to an original unconditioned, and just as every sensation ultimately relates to pure reason as something *that has its life within itself*, just so all that is mechanical ultimately relates to the not mechanical principle of the expression and interconnectedness of all its powers, all that is aggregated to the not aggregated and inseparable, all that follows laws of physical necessity to what does not follow but is original, free, universals to the particular, individuality to person. And it is my opinion that these insights arise from the immediate intuition which the rational being has of itself and of its relationship with an original being, and a world dependent on it. In answer to the question whether these insights are true insights or only imagined, and whether they contain truth or ignorance and error, the difference between your theory and my convictions becomes obvious. According to your teachings nature and generally all that is mentally represented takes on the internal and inscrutable form of our capacity of representation (I take here the word in its broadest sense) whereby not only reason’s conflict with itself is overcome but also a completely coherent system of philosophy becomes possible. I take the contrary view, looking for the form of human reason in the general form of all reality.⁹⁴

⁹³ Fichte, GA IV: 21, 28, quoted from Frank (1997): 664.

⁹⁴ See Jacobi to Kant Nov 16, 1789, Kant letter number 389, AA XI, 104.

Kant's "completely coherent system" was diagnosed by Jacobi as Spinozistic in the first edition of his *Spinozabriefe*, where he quotes from Kant's KrV A 25 and A 32 indicating that these observations on space and time are written "entirely in the spirit of Spinoza" (JWA 1: 96: 3–20, MW 218.).⁹⁵ The reason why he says this is clear: The *whole* space, which can be only one, must be *presupposed* in order to be able to conceive the parts. The whole is not *constituted by adding up the parts* but is rather an a priori presupposition. *Totum parte prius esse, necesse est* (the whole necessarily precedes its parts) (JWA 1: 111: 32f., MW 227).⁹⁶ *Spinoza formulated similarly: Substantia prior est natura suis affectionibus* (*substance precedes by nature its affects*) (EIp1). So also with time: time is no empirical concept. It is presupposed a priori.⁹⁷ Different segments of time do not constitute this conception of time. It is *synthetically* known *immediately*.⁹⁸ Finally, because this priority was not seen in Spinoza, Jacobi protested:

It is hard to understand how anyone could have objected to Spinoza that he had produced the unrestricted out of the sum of restricted things, and that his infinite substance is only an absurd aggregate of finite things, so that an empty unity of substance is a mere abstraction. I say that it is hard to understand how anyone could have accused him of anything of this kind, since his system proceeds from the very opposite position, and this opposite position is its true moving principle (...) *Totum parte prius esse necesse est* (JWA 1: 111: 23–32, MW 227).

He added a note at this place in the second edition to his *Spinozabriefe*, referring to the first *Supplement* on Giordano Bruno. We cannot elaborate here on that important first Supplement.⁹⁹ Henrich comments: The thought, that all is only undifferentiated one, is "absurd," for if we think this thought to the end, then we cannot think anything at all because we are faced with total vacuity. But the next thought is just as important:

⁹⁵ See on this Dahlstrom (2008b): 48.

⁹⁶ See Aristotle *Politics* 1253a 20. See EIp12, EIp13, EIp15sch. Jacobi spends significant effort (see JWA 1: 110: 10–111: 4 and in., JWA 1: 111: 15–36, MW 227) with reference to Spinoza's letter number 4 to Oldenburg as well as the "notable letter to Mayer on the infinity of substance" (Gb VI, 14).

⁹⁷ See KrV A 30–31.

⁹⁸ KrV A 32.

⁹⁹ See however Otto (2004).

“The key philosophical principle of all-unity can only mean there is no difference that cannot be put into question.”¹⁰⁰ But Spinoza’s *totum* can only be assumed, intuited or *believed*. And since this thought is clearly Spinoza’s thought and Spinoza is an “atheist” on account of the *immanence* of the creative principle, Jacobi is accused of having Lessing confess to being an atheist. Biester, who reprimands Jacobi, the “Spinozist philosophical *Schwärmer*,” in his letter to Kant of June 11, 1786 of “undermining and deriding any rational knowledge of God and of praising, indeed, almost deifying incomprehensible Spinoza’s pipe dreams,” urges Kant to draft a short piece against Jacobi to stop the mouth of this “screamer” (AA X 454, letter number 275). Kant does just this. In his essay *How to Orient oneself in Thought*, he writes: “It is incomprehensible, how the mentioned scholars (Jacobi and Wizenmann) could find support for Spinoza in the *Critique of Pure Reason*” (AAVIII 143).

Privately Jacobi repeated just that critique in his letter to Kleuker of Oct. 13, 1788, the date when he reports he has just begun reading Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*.¹⁰¹ Kant “turns even spirit into a machine,” he writes.¹⁰² This identification of Kant with Spinoza raised public heckles, e.g., in an anonymous review of the first edition of the *Spinozabriefe*. Biester writes to Kant in the quoted letter: “You have to speak up on this” (AA X 455). When Kant posits the *singularity* of space at KrV A 25, at the same time assigning *priority* to that singularity, rejecting that that singularity is composed by “its components,” he expresses for Jacobi Spinoza’s *totum*. He observed this Spinozism also later in Fichte and Schelling. So *with* Kant, Jacobi rejects a naturalist position. But *against* Kant and the idealists, he positions his own “realism.” The reasons are deeply rooted in Jacobi’s life. As we have already noted, he had since his earliest years a deep horror and fear of being *annihilated*, being confronted by the thought of an endless continuation of determinate finitude.¹⁰³ He had a cold dread all his life of all contentless abstractions and speculations that ultimately mean *nothing*. More specifically, what he feared all his life was that “truth” could be spelled out completely abstractly, *logically only, without intending my person*. Such abstractions are “destructive” because they “kill, annihilate” the real person (JWA 1: 339: 26–

¹⁰⁰ Henrich (2003): 12f.

¹⁰¹ See Ratjen (1842): 117–120, Jacobi letter 29 to Kleuker of Oct. 13, 1788. Stolzenberg (2004) provides an excellent discussion of Jacobi’s disagreement and dispute with Kant and quotes just this Jacobi letter 29 to Kleuker 19f. Kleuker (1749–1827) was a Protestant theologian at Kiel.

¹⁰² Ratjen (1842): 119.

¹⁰³ See JWA 1:216:2–218: 36, MW 362 rendition modified. See Lord (2011): 23f, 31f. JWA 1:13:13–24, MW 183 and JWA 1: 18: 2–20, MW 187.

40).¹⁰⁴ Jacobi saw Spinoza's rationalism as representing that abstraction. For this reason, he says to Lessing: "Spinoza is good enough for me" as far as his philosophy dedicated to the perfect working out of the principle of the PSR is concerned; nonetheless, "what a wretched salvation we find in his name!" (JWA 1: 17: 3–5, MW 187). The reason for that lousy "salvation" is the "blind fate," indeed nothing but "blind necessity" of an "infinite mechanism of nature" inherent in Spinoza's system, without purpose or intent (JWA 2: 398: 21, MW 559; JWA 2: 396: 29f, MW 557).¹⁰⁵ Its implications are a fatalistic reality expressed with Spinoza's famous statement *Deus sive Natura (God or nature)*.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ See Rühle (1989): 163.

¹⁰⁵ See Sandkaulen (1995): 418f.

¹⁰⁶ Space limitations prevent the explanation of this important principle and Jacobi's views on it, especially how it relates to Kant's philosophy. I intend to do so elsewhere. I thank the anonymous readers for their helpful suggestions in improving this essay as also Professor Ostaric, the editor of this journal. I also thank Stefan Schick and Birgit Sandkaulen for helpful comments on issues discussed here.

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List of Abbreviations of the Primary Sources

- GA Fichte, Johann Gottlieb (1845–1846). *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes Sämtlichen Werke*, ed. by I. H. Fichte. Berlin: Veit & Comp.
- GW Hegel, G. W. F. (1968ff) *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. Hamburg: Meiner. (Cited by volume, page number and line[s].)
- EL Hegel, G. W. F. (2010). *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. by Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Enz Hegel, G. W. F. (1970). *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften* [TWA 8, 9, 10]
- SL Hegel, G. W. F. (2010). *The Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. by George DiGiovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- TWA Hegel, G. W. F. (1970). *Werke in Zwanzig Bänden*, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Marcus Michael. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag.

- JWA Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich (1998ff). *Werke*, ed. by Klaus Hammacher and Walter Jaeschke. Hamburg-Stuttgart: Meiner-Frommann-Holzboog. (Cited by volume, page, line[s].)
- MW Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich (1994). *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel 'Allwill'*, trans. and ed. by George DiGiovanni. Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill University Press.
- KrV Kant, Immanuel. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft (Critique of Pure Reason)*. (Cited by the first, "A" edition and page numbers, and/or the second, "B" edition and page numbers.)
- AA Kant, Immanuel (1900–). *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin (formerly Königlich-Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften), 29 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter. I use the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992–. Deviations from the *Cambridge Edition* renditions are noted.
- E Spinoza, Baruch de. (2005). *Ethik in geometrischer Ordnung dargestellt*, vol. 2 of *Spinoza Sämtliche Werke* ed. by Wolfgang Bartuschat. Hamburg: Felix Meiner. (Cited in the traditional way by the part [I-V], "p" for proposition, or "d" for "demonstration, or "a" for "axiom," or "sch" for "scholium.")
- Gb Spinoza, Baruch de (2005). *Sämtliche Werke* ed. by Wolfgang Bartuschat. Hamburg: Felix Meiner. (Based on the classical edition Spinoza, Baruch de [1925]. *Opera*, ed. by Carl Gebhardt and Wolfgang Bartuschat, Heidelberg: C. Winter. The English translation consulted is Spinoza Baruch, de (1985, 2016). *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1 and vol. 2, trans. and ed. by Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press.)
- SW Schelling, F. W. J. (1856–1861). *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. by Karl Friedrich Schelling. Stuttgart, Augsburg: Cotta.
- KFSA Schlegel, Friedrich (1991). *Kritische Ausgabe Seiner Werke*, ed. by Ernst Behler. Paderborn: Schöningh.

Analysis and Synthesis within the Synthetic Method of the *Critique of Pure Reason*

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It is well known that Kant distinguishes between the synthetic method of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (hereafter, *CPR*) and the analytic method of the *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* (hereafter, *Prolegomena*). Kant's claim is as infamous as it is famous, and it has resulted in much frustration on the part of interpreters. However, if we take all of Kant's statements in the *Prolegomena* regarding the distinct methodological approaches of the two works together and in context—concerning the possibility of metaphysics—a fairly straightforward picture emerges. In this regard, the recent interpretation of Clinton Tolley sets the issues right and puts them in perspective. Nevertheless, another methodological distinction between the two works remains, concerning the possibility of metaphysics *as a science*. In this context, the *CPR* contains both analysis and synthesis, though a distinct form of analysis that is related to the methodology of Newtonian science.

To make my case, I will (§1) present the troublesome passages from the *Prolegomena*, along with an overview of some of the main treatments of the issues in the secondary literature; (§2) explain Kant's transition, in the *Prolegomena*, from the possibility of metaphysics to the possibility of metaphysics *as a science*, which is continued in the 1787 (B) edition of the *CPR*; and (§3) outline Kant's analogous use of the analytic–synthetic method of science in relation to the B-edition preface of the first *Critique* and explain how Kant's use of this method in the *CPR* culminates in the Transcendental Dialectic. What emerges from this discussion is that Kant's method in the *Prolegomena* is analytic in a way that the *CPR* is not—in relation to the question of the possibility of metaphysics—though the *CPR* uses an analytic–synthetic method in showing the possibility of metaphysics as a science, which culminates ultimately in his “indirect proof” of transcendental idealism.

§1. The Methodological Distinction between the *Prolegomena* and the *CPR*

Gabriele Gava notes that “Kant's distinction between a synthetic and an analytic method has been a continuous source of difficulties for many interpreters of the *Critique*,” focusing specifically on Kant's statement from the *Prolegomena* “that the

Critique of Pure Reason uses the synthetic method, while the *Prolegomena* proceeds analytically (4: 263, 274–275).¹⁰⁷ Kant makes a few statements to this regard, and it is important to look at them at length. First, Kant says:

1. Here [in the *Prolegomena*] then is such a *plan* subsequent to the completed work, which now can be laid out according to the *analytic method*, whereas the *work* itself absolutely had to be composed according to the *synthetic method*, so that the science might present all of its articulations, as the structural organization of a quite peculiar faculty of cognition, in their natural connection.¹⁰⁸ (4:263)

He goes on to state:

2. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* I worked on this question *synthetically*, namely by inquiring within pure reason itself, and seeking to determine within this source both the elements and the laws of its pure use, according to principles. This work is difficult and requires a resolute reader to think himself little by little into a system that takes no foundation as given except reason itself, and that therefore tries to develop cognition out of its original seeds without relying on any fact whatever. *Prolegomena* should by contrast be preparatory exercises; they ought more to indicate what needs to be done in order to bring a science into existence if possible, than to present the science itself. They must therefore rely on something already known to be dependable, from which we can go forward with confidence and ascend to the sources, which are not yet known, and whose discovery not only will explain what is known already, but will also exhibit an area with many cognitions that all arise from these same sources. The methodological procedure [*methodische Verfahren*] of prolegomena, and especially of those that are to prepare for a future metaphysics, will therefore be *analytic*.¹⁰⁹ (4: 274–275)

¹⁰⁷ Gabriele Gava, “Kant’s Synthetic and Analytic Method in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the Distinction between Philosophical and Mathematical Syntheses,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 23, no. 3 (September 2015): 2.

¹⁰⁸ Perhaps Kant intends a further distinction between the *Methode* in “*analytischer Methode*” and the *Lehrart* in “*synthetischer Lehrart*” in this passage. However, nothing of import seems to hang on a potential distinction. Throughout this article, all references to Kant’s *Prolegomena* are from Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, in *Theoretical Philosophy After 1781*, eds. Henry Allison and Peter Heath, trans. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Pagination is in text and refers to the standard *Akademie* edition of Kant’s works.

¹⁰⁹ Previous interpreters have implicitly equated (at least for the sake of argument) Kant’s previous *Methode* and *Lehrart* with the present *methodische Verfahren*. I am with them in this, though explicitly.

On the following page, he adds a note:

3. The analytic method, insofar as it is opposed to the synthetic, is something completely different from a collection of analytic propositions; it signifies only that one proceeds from that which is sought as if it were given, and ascends to the conditions under which alone it is possible. In this method one often uses nothing but synthetic propositions, as mathematical analysis exemplifies, and it might better be called the *regressive* method to distinguish it from the synthetic or *progressive* method. Again the name analytic is also found as a principal division of logic, and there it is the logic of truth and is opposed to dialectic, without actually looking to see whether the cognitions belonging to that logic are analytic or synthetic.¹¹⁰ (4: 276n)

In passage 1, Kant is contrasting his presentation of the *Prolegomena* with his composition of the *CPR*. The former is analytic, and the latter is synthetic. In passage 2., he is talking about how he answered the question of the possibility of metaphysics in the *CPR* synthetically, by which he says he means “within pure reason itself. . . .” Because the *Prolegomena* is a preparation, it will proceed analytically, relying “on something already known to be dependable. . . .” In passage 3., Kant opposes the analytic method to the synthetic method, with the former being “regressive” and the latter being “progressive.”

Paul Guyer has claimed that “such a distinction, even though suggested by Kant himself, simply was not maintained.”¹¹¹ Subsequent work has done more to think along with Kant on the methodological issues. Karl Ameriks’s interpretation allows for Kant to have a layered notion of analyticity, in which the deduction of the categories in the *CPR* is a regressive argument, though not in the specific sense Kant uses for the *Prolegomena*.¹¹² Graham Bird says, “The primary difference between the procedures

¹¹⁰ Here, in passage 3., Kant refers to the *Analytische Methode*, as in passage 1. However, he contrasts this analytic method simply with the *synthetischen* without a noun, which seems to indicate a *synthetische Methode*. I take this as evidence that any supposed distinction between methodological terms is not of crucial importance in the present context.

¹¹¹ Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 6.

¹¹² Karl Ameriks, “Introduction: The Common Ground of Kant’s *Critiques*,” in *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9. For Ameriks, Kant’s talk of the *Prolegomena* being analytic refers to the overall structure of the book in relation to the *CPR*, namely that the *Prolegomena* “has a peculiar abbreviated structure, focused mainly on presenting the ultimate *idealistic results* of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and defending them from misunderstandings. It therefore largely eschews the details of transcendental argumentation, totally skips the crucial

of the two works is that the *Prolegomena* takes the established sciences, mathematics and natural science, as data from which to identify their conditions, while the *Critique* does not.”¹¹³ While Bird is correct as far as his treatment goes, recent work has gone deeper into the issues.

Melissa McBay Merritt provides an interpretation that is more concerned with the context of Kant’s claims. She helpfully notes that “An analysis of any kind is intelligible only with respect to its starting point; hence, if we want to track the analyses in the *Critique*, we need to be clear about where the work begins.”¹¹⁴ For the *CPR*, the starting point is experience in general, not any particular experience.¹¹⁵ In this regard, Merritt points out an important feature of analysis and synthesis, which leads her to a question:

Our general model of scientific method involves analysis and synthesis as complements. So far our account of the synthetic character of the *Critique*’s argument has focused on the need to combine sensibility and understanding as elements of pure theoretical reason. Where is the analysis and where is the synthesis that the methodological model tells us we should expect?¹¹⁶

She points to the two-part structure of the Transcendental Deduction and concludes that the second part of the Deduction is (or contains) the synthetic moment: “this is the ‘synthetic’ account of the relation of sensibility and understanding insofar as each is capable of contributing to scientific knowledge of material nature.”¹¹⁷

Transcendental Deduction of the categories, and begins with premises that presuppose not only experience but also specific pure and scientific principles” (p. 9). Ameriks claims that “All this is compatible with allowing that there is a more basic but still in some sense regressive argument in Kant’s more fundamental discussions in the *Critique*, one that goes from ordinary experience to the original need for pure components” (p. 9). Ameriks presents the compatibility between the two types of analyticity in “Kant’s Transcendental Deduction as a Regressive Argument,” in *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), especially 52–54. The main shortcoming with Ameriks’ presentation of the distinction between the two works is his claim that the *Prolegomena* eschews transcendental argumentation; we see below that Clinton Tolley corrects this misunderstanding.

¹¹³ Graham Bird, “Kant’s Analytic Apparatus,” in *A Companion to Kant* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 134.

¹¹⁴ Melissa McBay Merritt, “Science and the Synthetic Method of the *Critique of Pure Reason*,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 59, no. 3 (March 2006): 528.

¹¹⁵ See Merritt, “Science and the Synthetic Method,” 530.

¹¹⁶ Merritt, “Science and the Synthetic Method,” 537.

¹¹⁷ Merritt, “Science and the Synthetic Method,” 539. She had already noted that the *CPR* differs from the *Prolegomena* in that the former has a deduction of the categories, whereas the latter does not: “The argument of the *Prolegomena* does not require a separate deduction of the categories. Their legitimacy is established by default” (p. 521). To be clear, she sees the first part of the Deduction as an analysis leading to the principle of the synthetic unity of apperception, with the second part of the Deduction the

In his treatment, Gava focuses on “Kant’s unspecific claim that the *Critique* proceeds synthetically, which suggests that the ‘whole’ *Critique* is synthetic.”¹¹⁸ Gava distinguishes between analytic/synthetic as argumentative approaches, or “specific lines of reasoning,” and as two types of “different expository strategy.”¹¹⁹ His claim is that Kant’s talk of the synthetic method of the first *Critique* refers to the latter, inasmuch as “the attribution ‘synthetic’ is ascribed to the first *Critique* in general and is connected to its systematic structure.”¹²⁰ He proceeds to look through the first *Critique* in order to locate the synthetic argument that Kant alludes to in the *Prolegomena*. For Gava, “Kant’s arguments in the ‘Aesthetic’ are analytic. . . .”¹²¹ So, he goes on to look at the Deduction. He points out that “the second step of the ‘Transcendental Deduction’ presents a peculiarity that is really important to Kant. At this stage, he is able to find a necessary connection between the synthesis of apperception and the categories (which depend on the understanding), and a pure synthesis of intuition (which belong to sensibility).”¹²² Gava (rightly) points out that Kant turns, in the second step of the Transcendental Deduction, to the notion of pure intuitive synthesis. For Gava, the payoff is that:

In order to perform its derivation of conclusions concerning possible experience (thanks to a reference to pure intuition) from the categories, the *Critique* is thus obliged to first identify a priori conditions of experience (belonging to intuition and the understanding respectively) by means of analysis. This is what Kant does in the ‘Transcendental Aesthetics’ and in the first step of the second version of the ‘Transcendental Deduction’.¹²³

While Merritt and Gava provide insight into features of Kant’s texts, as well as many of the issues involved with Kant’s distinction between analysis and synthesis, neither of them take the immediate context of the statement from the *Prolegomena* into consideration. I am referring specifically to passage 2, which begins: “In the *Critique of Pure Reason* I worked on this question *synthetically*, namely by inquiring

synthetic moment of the application of this principle, thereby synthetically making nature possible through recombining sensibility and understanding.

¹¹⁸ Gava, “Kant’s Synthetic and Analytic Method,” 6.

¹¹⁹ Gava, “Kant’s Synthetic and Analytic Method,” 6.

¹²⁰ Gava, “Kant’s Synthetic and Analytic Method,” 7.

¹²¹ Gava, “Kant’s Synthetic and Analytic Method,” 11.

¹²² Gava, “Kant’s Synthetic and Analytic Method,” 15.

¹²³ Gava, “Kant’s Synthetic and Analytic Method,” 16.

within pure reason itself, and seeking to determine within this source both the elements and the laws of its pure use, according to principles” (4: 274). Kant says that he was approaching a question synthetically in the *CPR*. What question? Neither Merritt nor Gava addresses the question.¹²⁴ If we look at the title Kant gives to the section containing passage 2, we see that it is labeled “*General Question of the Prolegomena: Is metaphysics possible at all?*” (4: 271). The immediate context of Kant’s statement concerning his synthetic procedure in the *CPR* is this discussion of the possibility of metaphysics:

[S]ummoned by the importance of the knowledge that we need, and made mistrustful, through long experience, with respect to any knowledge that we believe we possess or that offers itself to us under the title of pure reason, there remains left for us but one critical question, the answer to which can regulate our future conduct: *Is metaphysics possible at all?* But this question must not be answered by skeptical objections to particular assertions of an actual metaphysics (for at present we still allow none to be valid), but out of the still *problematic* concept of such a science.” (4: 274)

Immediately following the quote above, Kant says, “In the *Critique of Pure Reason* I worked on this question *synthetically*. . .” (4:274). Kant is talking here about classical metaphysics, regarding issues such as “knowledge of a supreme being and a future life. . .” (4:271).

Clinton Tolley provides an account of Kant’s distinction between analytic and synthetic methods in relation to the question of metaphysics.¹²⁵ Tolley equates the possibility of metaphysics with the possibility of metaphysical (or rational) cognition, and says:

The *Prolegomena* itself tells us . . . that each work sets about answering the question of the possibility of metaphysical cognition in a different way, according to a different ‘method.’ The *Critique* begins by examining the faculties of the soul

¹²⁴ None of the other interpreters thus far in this section address the question either; however, because Merritt and Gava deal more with the contextual issues of Kant’s claim, it is more surprising that they do not.

¹²⁵ Clinton Tolley, “From ‘Facts’ of Rational Cognition to Their Conditions: Metaphysics and the ‘Analytic’ Method” in *Kant’s Prolegomena: A Critical Guide*, ed. Peter Thielke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 48–70.

(sensibility, understanding, reason itself) that would provide the ‘elements’ for reason, and then sets out to establish what kind of cognition reason can come up with, given its material as its ‘source,’ and whether it can achieve metaphysical cognition in particular (4: 274). The *Prolegomena*, by contrast, examines three already acknowledged achievements (‘facts’) of reason itself, and then sets out to establish what conditions must be in place for such achievements to be possible, and if these conditions suffice to underwrite metaphysical cognition as well.¹²⁶

The *CPR* is synthetic in that it progresses up from the faculties of the mind to cognition, while the *Prolegomena* is analytic in that it descends from established “facts” to the conditions of their possibility. Kant’s goal in each approach (and in each work) is to show the possibility of metaphysics, albeit from opposite directions. Specifically, the *CPR* is synthetic—in the sense of progression mentioned in all three passages from the *Prolegomena*—because it

starts with our mental faculties themselves and uncovers their forms directly, and only then proceeds to derive certain ‘pure’ representations of objects which have their ‘origin’ a priori in the forms of these faculties, before finally then showing how these representations, due to their origin, can enable cognition a priori of the objects of these representations.¹²⁷

The method of the *Prolegomena* is analytic, or regressive, in that it will “begin with accepted cases of actual rational cognition, regress to their conditions, identify how such conditions can be given and recognized by reason as such, and in this way discover the ‘source’ or ‘basis’ that makes possible cognition a priori on their basis” (cf. 4: 274–275).¹²⁸

One benefit of this account is that it allows for the possibility that

Kant really means what he says in the *Prolegomena* about the method of the *Critique*—that it is really meant to offer progressive or synthetic arguments of the form: because a certain *faculty* is actual, and because all of its acts have

¹²⁶ Tolley, “From ‘Facts’ of Rational Cognition to Their Conditions,” 48.

¹²⁷ Tolley, “From ‘Facts’ of Rational Cognition to Their Conditions,” 63.

¹²⁸ Tolley, “From ‘Facts’ of Rational Cognition to Their Conditions,” 66.

certain ‘forms,’ then it can be demonstrated that certain representations and ultimately certain *cognitions* a priori of the objects of these representations are themselves possible.¹²⁹

Another benefit of Tolley’s interpretation is that he is concerned with relating the methodological considerations to the question of the possibility of metaphysics. Tolley points out that Kant not only begins with the question of the possibility of metaphysics, but Kant also ends the discussion by claiming that the solution to the question has been analytic: “Kant clearly characterizes both the method in Part III, and also the ‘solution’ to the general question of the work as a whole, as also ‘analytic’” (cf. 4: 365).¹³⁰ Kant’s statement at the very end of the Third Part of the *Prolegomena*: How is metaphysics in general possible? is, “And thus I conclude the analytic solution of the main question I myself have posed: How is metaphysics in general possible?, since I have ascended from the place where its use is actually given, at least in the consequences, to the grounds of its possibility” (4: 365). The next heading—occurring on the same page (4: 365)—asks a slightly different question: “How is metaphysics possible as science?” The very first sentence in this section is: “Metaphysics, as a natural predisposition of reason, is actual, but it is also of itself (as the analytical solution to the third main question proved) dialectical and deceitful” (4: 365). From this, we can see that Kant views himself to have already completed his analysis relating to passage 2., concerning the possibility of metaphysics. He is now dealing with the question of the possibility of metaphysics as a science. His answer to this question, in the *Prolegomena*, is mainly to refer to critique (which I take to mean the *CPR* itself). At this point, it will be helpful to look at the *CPR*, specifically the B Preface, for Kant’s subsequent discussion of the possibility of metaphysics as a science.

§2. Analysis, Synthesis, and the Possibility of Metaphysics as a Science in the *CPR* B Preface

In the *CPR*, Kant makes claims that seem problematic for Tolley’s reading of the analytic/synthetic distinction. For example, Kant says he has shown “in the *analytical part* of the Transcendental Logic that pure categories (and among them also the category of substance) have in themselves no objective significance at all

¹²⁹ Tolley, “From ‘Facts’ of Rational Cognition to Their Conditions,” 65.

¹³⁰ Tolley, “From ‘Facts’ of Rational Cognition to Their Conditions,” 66.

unless an intuition is subsumed under them, to the manifold of which they can be applied as functions of synthetic unity” (A348–349, my emphasis). Here, Kant is saying that (at least part of) the Transcendental Analytic is analytic. In case one might retort that this passage only occurs in 1781, we can add the following: “In *the analytical part of the critique* it is proved that space and time are only forms of sensible intuition . . . further that we have no concepts of the understanding and hence no elements for the cognition of things except insofar as an intuition can be given corresponding to these concepts. . .” (Bxxxv–xxvi, my emphasis). Kant is here clearly referring to the Aesthetic and Analytic as the “analytic part” of the *CPR*. To make sense of all this, we need to keep in mind that there were several different notions of analysis and synthesis in Kant’s day (as in our own).¹³¹ Furthermore, as Merritt points out, “An analysis of any kind is intelligible only with respect to its starting point; hence, if we want to track the analyses in the *Critique*, we need to be clear about where the work begins.”¹³² From the perspective of the *Prolegomena*, the *CPR* is synthetic. However, the *Prolegomena*’s is not the only perspective. Even though the *CPR* is synthetic from the perspective of the *Prolegomena*, from within the perspective of the *CPR* itself, there are both analytic and synthetic moments within a larger (synthetic) argument. Tolley’s assessment of the *CPR* being synthetic is correct; yet, the multifaceted and multivarious argumentative strategy of the *CPR* allows for both analytic and synthetic moments. The issue in understanding this is the starting point of the analysis (or synthesis). One way to look at this issue is from the vantage of the *CPR* as examining the possibility of metaphysics *as a science*.

Kant had been thinking of the method of metaphysics in relation to that of natural science long before the *Prolegomena*. In one of his earliest statements concerning method (from 1764), Kant notes that “in natural science, *Newton’s* method transformed the chaos of physical hypotheses into a secure procedure based on experience and geometry” (2: 275).¹³³ He then gives a discussion of the methods of analysis and synthesis (2: 276–277). He concludes this line of thought by saying that

¹³¹ For example, Courtney Morris, “The Analytic Method, the Synthetic Method, and the Idea of Philosophy: Kant on How to Read Kant” in *Existenz: An International Journal in Philosophy, Religion, Politics, and the Arts* 15, no 1. (Spring 2020), lists at least seven “different senses” of the analytic/synthetic distinction in Kant (p. 5).

¹³² Merritt, “Science and the Synthetic Method,” 528.

¹³³ Immanuel Kant, *Inquiry Concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality* in *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, eds. and trans. David Walford and Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Pagination is in text and refers to the standard *Akademie* edition of Kant’s works.

“The true method of metaphysics is basically the same as that introduced by *Newton* into natural science and which has been of such benefit to it” (2: 286), claiming that metaphysics can only proceed by way of the analytic method (2: 290).¹³⁴ Two years later (in 1766), Kant writes that “I feel secure about the method that has to be followed if one wants to escape the cognitive fantasy that has us constantly expecting to reach a conclusion,” (10: 55) clarifying that he is talking about “the proper method of metaphysics and thereby also the proper method for philosophy as a whole” (10: 56).¹³⁵ Gava is correct to note that Kant must have changed his mind (at least in some ways) between writing these lines and writing the *Prolegomena*, inasmuch as in 1764 Kant says that metaphysics can only proceed analytically, whereas in 1783 he says that he has proceeded synthetically.¹³⁶ Curiously, if we look at the B-edition preface to the first *Critique*, we find that Kant’s claims there are not as far from the 1764 statement as we might imagine.

In the B Preface to the *CPR*, Kant defines metaphysics as “a wholly isolated speculative cognition of reason that elevates itself entirely above all instruction from experience, and that through mere concepts” and laments the fact that it “has up to now not been so favored by fate as to have been able to enter upon the secure course of a science. . .” (Bxiv). He goes on to ask, “Now why is it that here the secure path of science still could not be found? Is it perhaps impossible?” (Bxv). This just is another way of asking if metaphysics is possible (or impossible) as a science. In this context, Kant presents mathematics and natural science—echoing the *Prolegomena*—as examples of reason producing bodies of cognition with scientific status (Bxv–xvi).

Kant mentions experiments by Galileo, Torricelli, and Stahl (Bxii–xiii), noting that in this “history of the experimental method” (Bxiin), “a light dawned on all those who study nature” (Bxiii). This light was the fact that “reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design. . .” (Bxiii). In this context, Kant turns to talk of the fate of metaphysics: “up to now the procedure of metaphysics has been a mere groping, and what is the worst, a groping among mere concepts” (Bxv). He then speaks of the “examples of mathematics and natural science” (Bxv) in terms

¹³⁴ Gava, “Kant’s Synthetic and Analytic Method,” points out that “These claims can be puzzling if read together with the *Prolegomena*” (p. 8). However, Gava simply notes that Kant had changed his mind between 1764 and 1783, without elaboration. Gava’s focus is on the distinction between mathematical and philosophical cognition in this regard, and his treatment is illuminating of those issues.

¹³⁵ Arnulf Zweig, ed. and trans., Letter from Kant to Johann Heinrich Lambert in *Correspondence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Pagination is in text and refers to the standard *Akademie* edition of Kant’s works.

¹³⁶ See Gava, “Kant’s Synthetic and Analytic Method,” 8.

of the “essential element in the change in the ways of thinking that has been so advantageous to them” (Bxvi), by which he means that reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design. He then recommends that we apply this “essential element” to metaphysics: “at least as an experiment, imitate it insofar as their analogy with metaphysics, as rational cognition, might permit” (Bxvi). It is precisely here that Kant presents his famous reversal between objects and cognition: “Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them. . .” (Bxvi). Kant mentions Copernicus’ revolution (Bxvi), and recommends that “in metaphysics we can try in a similar way regarding the **intuition** of objects” (Bxvi). Here, he gives the distinction between transcendental idealism and transcendental realism that he will state explicitly in the Dialectic, but of course based on the Aesthetic: “If intuition has to conform to the constitution of the objects, then I do not see how we can know anything of them *a priori*; but if the object . . . conforms to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, then I can very well represent this possibility to myself” (Bxvii). Kant points out that intuition alone is insufficient for cognition, and so the same experiment must be extended to our concepts: “I assume that the objects, or what is the same thing, the *experience* in which alone they can be cognized . . . conforms to those concepts, in which case I immediately see an easier way out of the difficulty. . .” (Bxvii). He continues, speaking of “objects insofar as they are thought merely through reason, and necessarily at that, but that . . . cannot be given in experience at all” (Bxvii). It is with these objects of reason that the experiment has its real payoff: for Kant, “the attempt to think them . . . will provide a splendid touchstone of what we assume as the altered method of our way of thinking, namely that we can cognize of things *a priori* only what we ourselves have put into them” (Bxviii).

Kant appends a footnote to this statement, which is crucial for my interpretation of the synthetic nature of the *CPR*. For this reason, it is worth quoting at length.

This method, imitated from the method of those who study nature, thus consists in this: to seek the elements of pure reason in that **which admits of being confirmed or refuted through an experiment**. Now the propositions of pure reason, especially when they venture beyond all

boundaries of possible experience, admit of no test by experiment with their **objects** (as in natural science): thus to experiment will be feasible only with **concepts** and **principles** that we assume *a priori* by arranging the latter so that the same objects can be considered from two different sides, **on the one side** as objects of the senses and the understanding for experience, and **on the other side** as objects that are merely thought at most for isolated reason striving beyond the bounds of experience. If we now find that there is agreement with the principle of pure reason when things are considered from this twofold standpoint, then the experiment decides for the correctness of that distinction. (Bxviii–Bxixn)

Kant does not mention any synthetic method here (though he does subsequently in the B Preface). His focus is on how transcendental idealism (presented in the Transcendental Aesthetic and Analytic) allows for viewing objects of experience in two ways, and this allows for a test of metaphysical assertions, based on the “method, imitated from the method of those who study nature. . . .” Brigitte Falkenburg points out that Kant here “imitates the method of Newton’s . . . science in the approach already taken by the pre-critical *Inquiry*. . . .”¹³⁷ She notes that:

The experiment of reason proceeds by means of conceptual analysis of the logical consequences of a specific metaphysical position, just as the experiments of natural science proceed by analysis of the phenomena under given conceptual preconditions. In this way, Kant continues the analogy between philosophical cognition and Galileo’s or Stahl’s experiments (*CPR*, B XIII–XIV). His thought experiment aims at confirming or refuting the “propositions of pure reason,” just as an experiment of physics or chemistry aims at confirming or refuting a specific scientific hypothesis.¹³⁸

Below, we will see that Kant presents the Transcendental Dialectic in exactly these terms.

¹³⁷ Brigitte Falkenburg, “Kant and the Scope of the Analytic Method” in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 71 (2018): 20.

¹³⁸ Falkenburg, “Kant and the Scope of the Analytic Method,” 20.

Returning to the main text, Kant says that the “experiment succeeds as well as we could wish, and it promises to metaphysics the secure course of a science in its first part” (Bxviii), and he makes it clear that this first part of metaphysics “concerns itself with concepts *a priori* to which the corresponding objects appropriate to them can be given in experience” (Bxviii). It is obvious that Kant is here talking about the Transcendental Deduction. He says that the experiment, resulting in the “alteration in our way of thinking” (Bxix) allows us to “explain the possibility of a cognition *a priori*. . .” (Bxix). He explicitly relates this to the Deduction, but in order to go beyond it, to classical metaphysics: “But from this deduction of our faculty of cognizing *a priori* in the first part of metaphysics, there emerges a very strange result, and one that appears very disadvantageous to the whole purpose with which the second part of metaphysics concerns itself. . .” (Bxix). The second part of metaphysics is the classical metaphysics with which he was concerned in the *Prolegomena*: “Metaphysics, as a natural predisposition of reason, is actual, but it is also of itself (as the analytical solution to the third main question proved) dialectical and deceitful” (4: 365). As a remedy for this dialectical and deceitful problem, Kant presents transcendental idealism. If we take appearances to be things in themselves, reason runs into dialectic and contradictions. If we take appearances as mere representations, “**the contradiction disappears. . .**” (Bxx). This result, according to Kant, “would show that what we initially assumed only as an experiment is well grounded” (Bxxi).¹³⁹ Falkenburg astutely notes that Kant is here concerned with natural science because he is concerned with the possibility of metaphysics as a science. Of this, she says, “The context of this thought experiment is Kant’s attempt to show how metaphysics may take the ‘secure course of a science’ . . . In the experiment of pure reason, the analogy between the methods of metaphysics and of Newtonian science once more seems to be most important for Kant.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Falkenburg, “Kant and the Scope of the Analytic Method,” also relates Kant’s talk here to the Antinomy of the Transcendental Dialectic: “The ‘contradiction’ is the antinomy of pure reason. Kant claims that in the transcendental dialectic of the *CPR*, he demonstrates that the antinomy is inevitable, if and only if transcendental realism is presupposed. Hence, in his view, the experiment of pure reason shows that transcendental realism is untenable; whereas the only other option, transcendental idealism, is (in his view) a necessary condition for our knowledge of the world. In this way, the transcendental argument sketched above is completed” (p. 21).

¹⁴⁰ Falkenburg, “Kant and the Scope of the Analytic Method,” 21.

Kant appends a footnote to this statement, which is also crucial for my (and Falkenburg's) interpretation of Kant's analogous experiment and the synthetic nature of the *CPR*, and so is also worth quoting at length.

This experiment of pure reason has much in common with what the **chemists** sometimes call the experiment of **reduction**, or more generally the **synthetic procedure**. The **analysis of the metaphysician** separated pure *a priori* knowledge into two very heterogeneous elements, namely those of the things as appearances and the things in themselves. The **dialectic** once again combines them, in **unison** with the necessary rational idea of the **unconditioned**, and finds that the unison will never come about except through that distinction, which is therefore the true one. (Bxxin)

Here, in terms of metaphysics, Kant speaks of an experiment which follows a synthetic method, with the first part of the synthetic method being analysis (separation or isolation), followed by synthesis (recombination into a unity). The first sentence is Kant's description of chemistry. After that, he is talking about his own procedure in the *CPR*, in which he separates a priori cognition into appearances and things in themselves (with this very distinction being key for solving the problems reason faces given transcendental realism). This is not the analysis of either the faculty of sensibility (in the Aesthetic) or the understanding (in the Analytic). Rather, Kant's distinction between appearances and things in themselves (or between phenomena and noumena) is a result of his distinction between sensibility and understanding. Kant recombines sensibility and understanding in the Deduction, but that is not the concern of metaphysics. Metaphysics is concerned with the separation of appearances and things in themselves. In support of the view that Kant is here describing his own analysis in the Aesthetic and Analytic of the *CPR*, Falkenburg gives an important reminder to the reader: "Note that the *transcendental analytic* ends with a chapter on the distinction between *phenomena* and *noumena*."¹⁴¹ Interestingly, Kant says that these elements are recombined in the dialectic, which I take to mean the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique*.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Falkenburg, "Kant and the Scope of the Analytic Method," 21.

¹⁴² In this, I agree with Falkenburg, "Kant and the Scope of the Analytic Method," who says, "The *transcendental dialectic*, in turn, investigates how the elements of pure reason may recombine, just as chemical elements unite to form compound substances" (p. 21).

Returning to the main text, Kant presents a continued discussion of metaphysics. Speculative reason is denied cognition into metaphysics, but a space is opened up for practical reason (Bxxi). The *Critique*—or what Kant refers to as “this critique of pure speculative reason” (Bxxii)—is the working out of the revolution of metaphysics “according to the example of the geometers and natural scientists” (Bxxii). It is here that Kant says that the work “is a treatise on the method, not a system of the science itself. . . .” (Bxxii). In further defending the Dialectic as the synthetic moment of the *CPR* (from the perspective of the *CPR* itself), Falkenburg makes a bold claim. She relates Kant’s experiment of pure reason specifically to Stahl’s chemical phlogiston theory:

According to Stahl’s chemical theory, reduction is the recovery of a metal from its ash-like calx by recombining the latter with phlogiston. . . . According to Kant’s experiment of pure reason, the *transcendental dialectic* is the recovery of metaphysics from its ashes by uniting the elements of pure reason in the right way, namely such that the “rational idea of the unconditioned” (CPR, B XXI) takes the distinction of *phenomena* and *noumena* into account. By doing so, the “reduction” of metaphysics just gives rise to the use of the traditional metaphysical ideas as regulative principles, in the domain of our cognition of the phenomena.¹⁴³

Such a detailed use of the analogy with the chemical method would not be out of character for Kant, as he used precisely this analogy—in great detail—to explain his moral philosophy in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

The distinction of the *doctrine of happiness* from the *doctrine of morals*, in the first of which empirical principles constitute the whole foundation whereas in the second they do not make even the smallest addition to it, is the first and most important business incumbent upon the Analytic of pure practical reason, in which it must proceed as *precisely* and, so to speak, as *scrupulously* as any geometer in his work. A philosopher, however, has greater difficulties to contend with here (as always in rational cognition through mere concepts without

¹⁴³ Falkenburg, “Kant and the Scope of the Analytic Method,” 22.

construction of them), because he cannot put any intuition (a pure noumenon) at its basis. He has, however, the advantage that, almost like a chemist, he can at any time set up an experiment [*ein Experiment*] with every human practical reason in order to distinguish the moral (pure) determining ground from the empirical, namely, by adding the moral law (as a determining ground) to the empirically affected will (e.g., that of someone who would gladly lie because he can gain something by it). When an analyst adds alkali to a solution of calcareous earth in hydrochloric acid, the acid at once releases the lime and unites with the alkali, and the lime is precipitated. In just the same way, if a man who is otherwise honest (or who just this once puts himself only in thought in the place of an honest man) is confronted with the moral law in which he cognizes the worthlessness of a liar, his practical reason (in its judgment of what he ought to do) at once abandons the advantage, unites with what maintains in him respect for his own person (truthfulness), and the advantage, after it has been separated and washed from every particle of reason (which is altogether on the side of duty), is weighed by everyone, so that it can enter into combination with reason in other cases, only not where it could be opposed to the moral law, which reason never abandons but unites with most intimately. (5: 92–93)

This passage is reminiscent of the B Preface discussion of method. In the B Preface, Kant uses logic, mathematics, and natural sciences as examples of proper sciences for metaphysics to emulate. It was more difficult for mathematics to become a science than logic (Bx–xi), yet it was even more difficult for natural science (Bxii). The method of philosophy has more in common with the method of natural sciences, given that it has also proven difficult for philosophy to become a science. Similarly, practical philosophy, though its goal is to be as rigorous as geometry, “has greater difficulties to contend with,” and so must use a method more in line with that of chemistry. I take Kant’s equation of “intuition” with “pure noumenon” to be a reference to intellectual intuition, such that moral philosophy could proceed like geometry if human beings had intellectual intuition. Since we lack intellectual intuition, moral philosophy must be *more like* chemistry. Here, we begin with a “solution of calcareous earth in hydrochloric acid” as the compound that needs to be analyzed. (The calcareous earth is lime.) The analyst “adds alkali” to the solution, causing the hydrochloric acid to simultaneously separate from (release) the lime and unite with the alkali. Similarly,

the philosopher begins with an empirically affected will as the compound. The philosopher adds the moral law, which causes the will to simultaneously separate from the empirical affectations (“advantage”) and unite with the will. The goal of the separation is unification, inasmuch as analysis precedes synthesis. In the theoretical philosophy, Kant separates cognition—as a mixture of pure a priori and empirical cognition—into its elements, resulting in appearances (phenomena) and things in themselves (noumena). It is only after this analysis/separation that “The **dialectic** once again combines them, in **unison** with the necessary rational idea of the **unconditioned**, and finds that the unison will never come about except through that distinction, which is therefore the true one” (Bxxin).

§1 argued that the *CPR* is thoroughly synthetic. §2 has argued that the *CPR* contains both analysis and synthesis. What remains is to explain how these two claims are compatible. How can both analysis and synthesis be at work in a thoroughly synthetic methodology? It is in answering this question that my interpretation is set apart. While I follow Tolley concerning the synthetic nature of the *CPR*, he does not deal with the analysis–synthesis moments in the book, and while I agree with Falkenburg concerning Kant’s analogous use of the Newtonian/chemistry method in the *CPR*, my position differs from hers in the precise relationship between the *CPR* and the *Prolegomena*.¹⁴⁴

§3. Analysis and Synthesis within the Synthetic Method of the *CPR*

What we have seen thus far is that Kant, in the *Prolegomena*, says that the *CPR* “had to be composed according to the *synthetic method*. . . .” (4: 263), Kant dealt with the possibility of metaphysics synthetically in the *CPR* (4: 274), and the synthetic method is progressive (4: 276n); the *CPR* “takes no foundation as given except reason itself . . . without relying on any fact whatever” (4: 274). While the *CPR* uses a method analogous to that of natural science, Tolley has shown that Kant meant what he said in that the *CPR* begins only with the “faculties of the soul (sensibility, understanding, reason itself) that would provide the ‘elements’ for reason, and then sets out to establish what kind of cognition reason can come up with, given its material as its ‘source,’ and whether it can achieve metaphysical cognition in particular.”¹⁴⁵ Nothing in the preceding section is inconsistent with any of these claims. It will be helpful to

¹⁴⁴ See note 43 for my qualms with Falkenburg on this issue.

¹⁴⁵ Tolley, “From ‘Facts’ of Rational Cognition to Their Conditions,” 48.

remind ourselves of Merritt's insightful claim concerning analysis: "An analysis of any kind is intelligible only with respect to its starting point; hence, if we want to track the analyses in the *Critique*, we need to be clear about where the work begins."¹⁴⁶ How is the *Prolegomena* purely analytic in a way that the *CPR* is not? What are the starting points of the two works?

The *Prolegomena* begins from the facts of mathematics and natural science and examines how these are possible as synthetic a priori bodies of cognition. Then, Kant turns to metaphysics, or rational cognition, with the results of these other disciplines in hand. Kant's concern is with how such cognition is possible. He is examining the conditions of the possibility of metaphysical cognition. Gava and Merritt are correct to note that the deduction is not present in the *Prolegomena*, but this is a consequence of the analytic nature of the work, rather than the reason for it. Kant could not give a deduction of the categories in a purely analytic work. Kant explicitly states that the deduction of the categories in the *CPR* is an "analytic of concepts," but he clarifies that this is not an analysis of the concepts "or the usual procedure of philosophical investigations," but it is the "**analysis of the faculty of understanding itself. . .**" (A65/B90). In this analysis, Kant is "seeking them [the categories] in the understanding as their birthplace and analyzing its pure use in general. . . ." (A65–66/B90).¹⁴⁷ Here, Kant's concern is to "pursue the pure concepts into their first seeds and predispositions in the human understanding," and experience only serves as the opportunity for them to be "developed and exhibited in their clarity by the very same understanding, liberated from the empirical conditions attaching to them" (A66/B91). This is what Kant means when he says that the *CPR* "takes no foundation as given except reason itself, and that therefore tries to develop cognition out of its original seeds without relying on any fact whatever" (4: 274). The *CPR* is synthetic in that it does not rely on any facts, not even experience itself. The *Prolegomena* begins with the facts of experience and examines them to see the conditions that render them possible, and then compares metaphysical (rational) cognition to these other facts of cognition; the *CPR* begins only with the faculties of sensibility, understanding, and reason with a view to examining how metaphysical (rational) cognition is possible. The deduction of the categories has no place in the *Prolegomena* because the *Prolegomena*

¹⁴⁶ Merritt, "Science and the Synthetic Method," 528.

¹⁴⁷ This is also why Ameriks, "Kant's Transcendental Deduction as a Regressive Argument," can claim that the deduction is analytic or regressive. It is an analysis. However, it is synthetic in the sense of not relying on any given facts outside of reason itself.

has no need of it, due to its analytic nature. The deduction is required in the *CPR* because this synthetic work sets its task as explaining experience from an examination of the faculties themselves—because it is synthetic. The starting points of the two works are different.

The *CPR* contains an analysis of sensibility, and analysis of the understanding, and other analyses. However, none of these analyses rely on facts outside of the rational faculties. To be clear: none of these analyses are analyses of facts outside of the rational faculties. It is precisely in this way that the *CPR* can have analytic moments, with even the entirety of the Aesthetic and Analytic being analytic, in the analytic–synthetic method, while still remaining synthetic as a whole. In the three *Prolegomena* passages, Kant is referring to the starting point of the *CPR*, which is an examination of reason itself in contradistinction to the *Prolegomena*’s starting point of given facts of cognition. In the *CPR* passages, Kant is referring to how he is going about examining the faculties of the mind, which requires an analysis of them, abstracted from all given facts of cognition or experience.¹⁴⁸ We have seen that Falkenburg points out that Kant ends the Analytic of the *CPR* with a chapter on the division between phenomena and noumena, and she argues that this distinction marks a result of Kant’s analogous experimental analysis. It is now important to show that Kant is thinking only in terms of the understanding itself, and so the claim is consistent with the *CPR* being synthetic in that it is dealing only with the mental faculties. Kant begins the chapter by talking about having traversed “the land of pure understanding. . .” (A235/B294). He goes on to speak of “everything that the understanding draws out of itself, without borrowing it from experience. . .” (A236/B295). His concern—which is continued in the “indirect proof” in the Dialectic—is to show “That the understanding can . . . make only empirical use of all its *a priori* principles, indeed of all its concepts, but never transcendental use. . . .” (A238/B297). He then avers that

¹⁴⁸ In this way, Bird’s basic description of the two works is correct, though it lacks sufficient detail. Also, Merritt and Gava are correct to see synthetic moments within the deduction of the categories, though they do not see that this is part of a larger analysis of the understanding, which is part of a larger synthetic project (from the perspective of the *Prolegomena*). As Tolley explains, the entire *CPR* is synthetic, as Kant clearly says in the *Prolegomena*. It seems to me that Falkenburg is correct in her *Kant’s Cosmology: From the Pre-Critical System to the Antinomy of Pure Reason* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020) when she claims Kant’s argument from incongruent counterparts appears in the *Prolegomena* but not in the *CPR* “due to the fact that the *CPR* develops the principles of transcendental philosophy according to the synthetic method, in contradistinction to the analytic presentation in the *Prolegomena*. . .” (p. 104), and “Given that the argument from incongruent counterparts employs the analytic rather than the synthetic method, it reappears in the *Prolegomena*, but not in the Transcendental Aesthetic of the *CPR*” (p. 105).

“The transcendental use of a concept in any sort of principle consists in its being related to things **in general** and **in themselves**; its empirical use, however, in its being related merely to **appearances**, i.e., objects of a possible **experience**” (A238/B298). This is precisely his concern in the B Preface in his analogy to chemical reduction, in which “The **analysis of the metaphysician** separated pure *a priori* knowledge into two very heterogeneous elements, namely those of the things as appearances and the things in themselves” (Bxxin). As Falkenburg points out, this distinction is what Kant himself has performed in the Aesthetic and Analytic of the *CPR*. Now, we need to examine the next part of the B Preface note: “The **dialectic** once again combines them, in **unison** with the necessary rational idea of the **unconditioned**, and finds that the unison will never come about except through that distinction, which is therefore the true one” (Bxxin).

In the 1781 version of the Paralogisms, Kant begins by framing what he is about to do in terms of what he had already done (in the Deduction). He says that he has shown that “in the analytical part of the Transcendental Logic that pure categories (and among them also the category of substance) have in themselves no objective significance at all unless an intuition is subsumed under them, to the manifold of which they can be applied as functions of synthetic unity” (A348–349). I take it that Kant is contrasting the “analytical part” of the Transcendental Logic with the synthetic part, with the former being the Transcendental Analytic and the latter being the Transcendental Dialectic. It is in the A-edition version of the Paralogisms that Kant gives his most extensive discussion of the difference between transcendental idealism and transcendental realism (A369–A378). In short, transcendental idealism allows for empirical realism because appearances are representations inside us (in the transcendental sense), and so no inference to the external world is required. Transcendental realism, on the other hand, views things that appear as existing outside of us (in the transcendental sense), and so is forced to merely infer their very existence, such that empirical realism itself is in doubt, because all we have are representations.

In his discussion of the Antinomy of Pure Reason (in both 1781 and 1787), Kant summarizes the Aesthetic concerning pure intuition, contrasting transcendental idealism and transcendental realism (A490–491/B518–519). And, of course, he uses this distinction to solve the contradictions of reason presented in the Antinomies. It is here that he uses the same language (present in both 1781 and 1787) as in the B Preface:

Accordingly, the antinomy of pure reason in its cosmological ideas is removed by showing that it is merely dialectical and a conflict due to an illusion arising from the fact that one has applied the idea of absolute totality, which is valid only as a condition of things in themselves, to appearances that exist only in representation, and that, if they constitute a series, exist in the successive regress but otherwise do not exist at all. But one can, on the contrary, draw from this antinomy a true utility, not dogmatic but critical and doctrinal utility, namely that of thereby proving indirectly the transcendental ideality of appearances, if perhaps someone did not have enough in the direct proof in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*. The proof would consist in this dilemma. If the world is a whole existing in itself, then it is either finite or infinite. Now the first as well as the second alternative is false (according to the proof offered above for the antithesis on the one side and the thesis on the other). Thus it is also false that the world (the sum total of all appearances) is a whole existing in itself. From which it follows that appearances in general are nothing outside our representations, which is just what we mean by their transcendental ideality. (A506–507/B534–535)

Of course, this indirect proof does not exactly recombine into a unity appearances and things in themselves. Rather, it simply says that empirical representations are appearances and not things in themselves. However, Kant's specific example at Bxxvii–xxix was with how freedom could be saved, and by this he means freedom in one person (at the same time allowing for causality). Kant's specific recombination of appearances and things in themselves comes in his discussion of freedom in the third antinomy.

In the third antinomy, Kant says, “if appearances are things in themselves, then freedom cannot be saved” (A536/B564), but if appearances are seen as only appearances (representations but not things in themselves), then “The effect can therefore be regarded as free in regard to its intelligible cause, and yet simultaneously, in regard to appearances, as their result according to the necessity of nature. . .” (A537/B564). Kant concludes this specific discussion:

Here I have only wanted to note that since the thoroughgoing connection of all appearances in one context of nature is an inexorable law, it necessarily would have to bring down all freedom if one were stubbornly to insist on the reality of appearances. Hence even those who follow the common opinion about this matter have never succeeded in *uniting nature and freedom with one another*. (A537/B565, my emphasis)

Kant's specific example at Bxxvii–xxix was with how freedom could be saved, and by this he means freedom in one person (at the same time allowing for causality). In this way, the individual agent can be viewed as both a thing in itself (noumenon) and appearance (phenomenon). Transcendental idealism allows for this “recombination” or synthesis of the elements that had been separated by the “analysis of the metaphysician,” whereas transcendental realism does not. Falkenburg refers to this as “Kant’s heuristic use of the *complete* analytic–synthetic method in the ‘experiment of pure reason. . . .’”¹⁴⁹ We can say that Kant here “finds that the unison will never come about except through that distinction, which is therefore the true one” (Bxxix). The distinction between appearances/phenomena and things in themselves/noumena is possible only with transcendental idealism, and only transcendental idealism can avoid the dialectical inferences of reason. Kant’s main example in this regard is the compatibility of authentic freedom (at the noumenal level) and determinism (at the phenomenal level) combined in the individual agent as a unity.

¹⁴⁹ Falkenburg, *Kant’s Cosmology*, 227. For Falkenburg, Kant here “aims at making the results of the *CPR* more accessible” (p. 227). Perhaps Kant is limiting the proof to a merely heuristic use. Falkenburg seems to tread lightly here (as opposed to her bold relation of Kant’s analogy to the phlogiston theory of Stahl) because of the way she understands Kant’s claims about method in the *Prolegomena*: “Kant’s critical method reverses the traditional Newtonian methodology, according to which analysis has to precede synthesis. . . . After the critical turn, Kant no longer considers the analytic method as an appropriate method of justifying metaphysical principles. He merely thinks that it might complement the deductions of the *CPR* by making their results more accessible, via a popular approach” (p. 227). She continues, “In his thought experiment, which is intended to make transcendental idealism more plausible, Kant employs the complete analytic–synthetic method of Newtonian science by analogy, in order to get the readers of the *CPR* engaged with his doctrine of the cosmological antimony. In his view, the antinomy (and in particular, its mathematical part) definitely refutes transcendental realism and leaves transcendental idealism as the only tenable position. The ‘experiment of pure reason’ has the structure of an inference to the only possible explanation . . . which he furthermore underlines by appealing to the method of Newtonian science” (p. 227). On my reading, no reversal is needed, as the *CPR* itself contains the analysis–synthesis of the Newtonian method. What has changed is not Kant’s view of method; rather, it is Kant’s view of the starting point of the inquiry. The critical project requires an analysis of the faculties of reason, and this is synthetic from the perspective of the *Prolegomena* in that it does not begin with any “facts” outside of reason.

In the *CPR*, Kant is concerned with the possibility of metaphysics as a science. He attempts to demonstrate this possibility by using a method analogous to that of the scientific method of his day. In this method, Kant's focus is on the faculties of reason themselves, and he does not rely on any facts outside of reason. This focus is what makes the *CPR* synthetic. In the *Prolegomena*, Kant is using an analytic method in that he is relying on established facts from bodies of cognition outside of *pure* reason, and he allows himself to lean on the *CPR*. The main question of the *Prolegomena* is "How is metaphysics possible?," which does not require the synthetic method. When Kant, in the *Prolegomena*, turns to the question of the possibility of metaphysics as a science, he leans more heavily on the *CPR*, even beginning the discussion of the scientific possibility of metaphysics with the statement that he has already performed "the analytical solution to the third main question. . ." (4: 365). While both the *CPR* and the *Prolegomena* are analytical and provide analyses, the *CPR* is synthetic through and through in the specific way Kant describes in the *Prolegomena*.¹⁵⁰

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¹⁵⁰ I would like to thank the two anonymous referees for *SGIR Review* for their invaluable comments, which helped me to think through the issues anew. Also, I would like to thank Lara Ostaric for helping me to clarify many aspects of the final version of this article.

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Session at the Eastern APA 2023

Pablo Muchnik
Emotivism: A Kantian Response

Oliver Thorndike

A Reply to Muchnik: Strange Bedfellows – MacIntyre and Kant

Pablo Muchnik
Reply to Thorndike

Emotivism: A Kantian Response

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This paper is an attempt to put in conversation two strange bedfellows: MacIntyre and Kant. The former sees the latter as one of the major culprits in the demise of virtue ethics and the catastrophic failure of the Enlightenment to justify morality. This situation, MacIntyre thinks, is to blame for the rise of emotivism and the crisis of contemporary moral discourse—a crisis so profound that only a drastic shift in philosophical attention, away from questions of liberal justice and toward questions of human flourishing, could rescue us from it.

I find MacIntyre's description of the contemporary moral situation rich and insightful but have misgivings about his dismissal of Kant. For, once we shake off the facile picture of Kant as an Enlightenment hero and venture into the darker corners of his moral psychology, we realize that he anticipates the bulk of MacIntyre's critic of emotivism and shares his distrust of liberal politics.

In what follows, I will use MacIntyre as a springboard to tell the Kantian side of this story. Seen from that vantage point, the epistemological and moral challenges emotivism poses prove to have roots much deeper than MacIntyre's socio-historical approach might suggest: roots that Kant's account of error, self-deception, and radical evil can help us illuminate. Exposing those roots, I believe, is necessary to confront the current crisis.

—I—

In *After Virtue* (1981), MacIntyre claims that emotivism, a moral theory in vogue among Anglophone philosophers during the first half of the twentieth century, is much more than a passing fashion.¹⁵¹ As MacIntyre sees it, emotivism gives voice to a mode of thinking that “has become embodied in our culture” (AV, 22). Its fundamental tenet is that “all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling” (AV, 11–12), and hence that there is “no rational way of securing moral agreement” (AV, 6). For, no matter how much we may try to shore up our arguments

¹⁵¹ All quotations are from Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2008). I will refer to this text as AV, followed by the page number.

with reasons, “[v]alue judgments in their origin are not strictly judgments at all” but “exclamations expressive of approval” or disapproval.¹⁵²

Emotivists interpret sentences of the form “This is right or good” to mean roughly “Hurrah for this,” or, in the more sophisticated version articulated by Charles L. Stevenson, “I *do* like it, do so as well.”¹⁵³ And they take “This is wrong or evil” to mean something like “Boo for this” or “I disapprove of it, reject it also.” The purpose of moral debate, according to this view, is not to convince those who disagree with us but to affect how they feel—a goal which at times may involve persuasion and at times a display of force, depending on our respective standing and prior relation. For, as Stevenson pithily puts it, the point of moral utterance is “to *create an influence*,” “to *change or intensify*” interests and emotions that already exist.¹⁵⁴

The effectiveness of this use of language relies on the mimetic power of feelings. In social contexts, Stevenson argues, “people take up more or less the same attitudes” and “ethical judgments propagate themselves.”¹⁵⁵ “One man says ‘this is good’; this may influence the approval of another person, who then makes the same ethical judgment, which in turn influences another person, and so on.”¹⁵⁶ This transmission of feelings explains why different communities reach different consensus: each member calls “good” whatever their group happens to like, adopting values that members of other communities, with different sentiments and attitudes, find unacceptable or bizarre.¹⁵⁷

But mimesis is not the whole story. The propagation of moral utterance presupposes, in addition, the systematic concealment of the speaker’s intentions. For, acknowledging what one is really doing, namely, creating “an influence” by means of grounds one assumes to be purely subjective, would make the project of persuasion self-defeating. Success requires that I present my claims *as if* they were reason-giving, for it is precisely by deflecting attention away from my preferences that I can affect others “in a much more subtle, less fully conscious way.”¹⁵⁸ For an emotivist, the appearance of argumentation in moral debate is just a masquerade: “the consideration

¹⁵² This is Barnes’s formulation of the emotivist position. See W. H. F. Barnes, “A Suggestion about Value,” *Analysis* 1, no. 3 (March 1934): 45.

¹⁵³ Charles L. Stevenson, *Facts and Values: Studies in Ethical Analysis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 25.

¹⁵⁴ Stevenson, *Facts and Values*, 16.

¹⁵⁵ Stevenson, *Facts and Values*, 18.

¹⁵⁶ Stevenson, *Facts and Values*, 18.

¹⁵⁷ Stevenson, *Facts and Values*, 18.

¹⁵⁸ Stevenson, *Facts and Values*, 25.

about other people's interest" is not an attempt to give them reasons for agreement, but "an additional means [one] may employ in order to move [them]."¹⁵⁹ The alleged universality of moral claims is selfishness by other means.

–II–

What MacIntyre finds most disturbing about emotivism is not its problematic philosophical assumptions.¹⁶⁰ Mistaken as they may be, they are indicative of a much larger problem, namely, that this mode of thought "presupposes a sociology," a mode of life in which "any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations" (AV, 23) has been obliterated:

If emotivism is true, this distinction is illusory. For evaluative utterances can in the end have no point or use but the expression of my own feelings or attitudes and the transformation of the feelings and attitudes of others. It cannot genuinely appeal to impersonal criteria, for there are no impersonal criteria. I may think that I so appeal and others may think that I appeal, but these thoughts will always be mistakes. The sole reality of distinctly moral discourse is the attempt of one will to align the attitudes, feelings, preferences and choices of another with its own. Others are always means, never ends. (AV, 24)¹⁶¹

Putting things this way allows MacIntyre to shed light on "the most striking feature of contemporary moral utterance," i.e., "that so much of it is used to express disagreements" that are "interminable" in principle (AV, 6). To illustrate this point, MacIntyre reconstructs the standard arguments presented by defenders and detractors of abortion rights, public healthcare, and war—a list which can be easily

¹⁵⁹ Stevenson, *Facts and Values*, 16.

¹⁶⁰ MacIntyre criticizes emotivism on three grounds: the theory is unable to distinguish (without circularity) *moral* attitudes from other kinds of attitudes; it confuses the "use" and "meaning" of moral terms; and it lacks historical self-awareness, and hence attributes universality to what is a contingent cultural situation (AV, 13–22).

¹⁶¹ The indignation MacIntyre feels toward emotivism is, paradoxically, fueled by the same Enlightenment values whose failure to justify morality he blames for the current moral crisis. In sentences that could be extracted from the *Groundwork*, MacIntyre writes: "To treat someone else as an end in itself is to offer them what I take to be good reasons for acting in one way rather than another, but to leave it to them to evaluate those reasons. It is to be unwilling to influence another except by reasons which that other he or she judges to be good. It is to appeal to impersonal criteria of the validity of which each rational agent must be his or her own judge. By contrast, to treat someone else as a means is to seek to make him or her an instrument of my purposes by adducing whatever influences or considerations will in fact be effective on this or that occasion" (AV, 23-4).

expanded to include voting rights, the right to carry arms and affirmative action (to name just a few of our current debates). Indeed, we are no closer to reaching consensus on these issues than on those MacIntyre found so divisive in the 1980s. For, even when exponents of rival views present internally consistent and sound arguments, there are no prospects that debaters will ever reach consensus. “[D]ebates go on and on and on” and “apparently can find no terminus” (AV, 6), MacIntyre believes, because behind the pretense of impersonal argumentative exchanges there is a clash of assertion and counter-assertion, a conflict between subjective values, opposing attitudes, and incommensurable premises.

This situation, MacIntyre thinks, points to a fundamental duplicity at the heart of contemporary moral discourse: the refusal to abandon the old habits of rational argumentation is accompanied by the suspicion that those habits are doomed to failure. Although disputants mobilize their reason to justify their subjective preferences, they pretend that nothing of this sort is taking place. They keep acting as if reason could shape their moral beliefs and conduct, yet surmise that rationality is impotent to do so. The tension between the simultaneous adherence to rational standards and the thoroughgoing skepticism about their motivational power, MacIntyre observes, is what “imparts a paradoxical air to contemporary moral disagreement” (AV, 9). For everybody suspects, and suspects that others suspect, that purely subjective interests lie at the basis of moral values; and yet, they collectively pretend that those interests are not at stake, that objectivity and reason have the capacity to shape their beliefs and determine their actions.

Bad faith, however, is not limited to our relation with others—a similar pretense also permeates our self-relation. For, MacIntyre notices, the same arbitrariness we display in defending our views in public forums is in play in “the arguments we have within ourselves” (AV, 8). This is so, because

whenever an agent enters the forum of public debate he has already presumably, explicitly or implicitly, settled the matter in question in his own mind. Yet if we possess no unassailable criteria, no set of compelling reasons by means of which we may convince our opponents, it follows that in the process of making up our own minds we have made no appeal to such criteria or such reasons. If I lack any good reasons to invoke against you, it must seem that I lack any good reasons. Hence it seems that underlying my own position there

must be some non-rational decision to adopt that position. Corresponding to the interminability of public argument there is at least the appearance of a disquieting private arbitrariness. It is small wonder if we become defensive and therefore shrill. (AV, 8)

The antagonistic public stance we adopt toward others, MacIntyre indicates, is partly a cause, partly a consequence, of the doubt we feel about the validity of our own values. The fear that such values are arbitrary is masked by an arrogant commitment to defend them at all cost. This is a thinly veiled attempt to hide from ourselves their subjective nature, admitting to which would be unsettling and make of the use of argumentation a nonstarter. Mutual antagonism and anxiety about the value of our values go hand in hand for MacIntyre: they are self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating phenomena, signs of an emotivist mode of thinking that has become dominant in our culture and permeates every aspect of our lives.¹⁶²

So construed, emotivism is the philosophy that fits and legitimizes a world of aspiring, yet insecure and anxious tyrants, eager to call “good or right” their own preferences, yet wary that their claims cannot be justified. Social media platforms—with their echo chambers and inexhaustible power to amplify likes and dislikes—are the perfect vehicle for this mode of life and expression, the necessary corollary of an emotivist culture. And so is the proliferation of fake news and conspiracy theories, which mobilize evidentiary standards and rely on epistemic virtues to spread convenient falsehoods. Tribalism and political polarization are not aberrations but the natural outgrowth of emotivism.

—III—

This is the grim social reality MacIntyre prophesized more than four decades ago in the opening pages of *After Virtue*. I am not interested here in following

¹⁶² This mode of thinking is exemplified, MacIntyre argues throughout the book, by three character types that embody the emotivist outlook in contemporary society: the “aesthete,” who consumes others as stimuli for his pleasure; the “therapist,” who normalizes his patients; and the “manager,” who sees human beings as resources to exploit in the pursuit of profit (see AV, chapter 3). These are “types,” MacIntyre explains, because in these characters “role and personality [are] fused” (AV, 29). They are meant to show how emotivism has invaded every aspect of contemporary life: our relations with others, our self-relation, and our relations in the marketplace. To this triad, we should add the “politician,” the emotivist type who in the last few decades has become ever more conspicuous in the public realm.

MacIntyre's proposal to overcome it.¹⁶³ Nor will I linger on the fascinating historical narrative he develops to account for how we ended up in this desperate position. Nor will I consider his intricate (and in my mind ultimately failed) attempt to defend, throughout his long philosophical career, the controversial theses he advanced in that groundbreaking book. What I want to do, instead, is to accept MacIntyre's diagnosis of the pathologies of contemporary moral discourse at face value and take emotivism as a *symptom* of the ailments of modernity, as expression of the moral self-conception dominant in our culture. For, if MacIntyre is right and emotivism is not a blip in the history of ethics but a sign of a deeper affliction, a set of fundamental questions can be raised: What kind of selfhood underlies the emotivist mode of thinking? What is its *modus operandi*? How does this volitional structure manage to sustain itself in its bad faith? What are the social and political conditions that make it so prevalent in the contemporary world?

Although MacIntyre gives a broad sociological account of these questions, he remains mostly silent about the moral psychology that makes emotivism possible. This is a curious omission for a virtue ethicist, for only by understanding the distorting mechanisms that produce emotivist beliefs and values can we begin to develop appropriate countermeasures and thus start to make sense of human flourishing. No matter how accurate, MacIntyre's description of the contemporary moral situation is not enough: without analyzing the goings-on in the emotivist mind, we will fail to understand how the emotivist agent construes the world the way she does, how she sees herself and others, and what drives her behavior. To shed light on this neglected psychological dimension, I suggest we reverse the course of MacIntyre's inquiry and focus on the "who" and not the "what." That is to say, instead of considering emotivism as a freestanding problem, I propose we turn to the type of selfhood that generates it in the first place.

It is at this juncture that Kant proves to be a valuable interlocutor. For, in Kant's discussion of "error" and its next of kin, "radical evil," we can find traces of the type of selfhood MacIntyre ascribes to the emotivist agent. There is a common volitional structure at the basis of these disparate notions. Understanding its *modus operandi*

¹⁶³ The proposal includes, among other things, MacIntyre's attempt to revive virtue ethics, the use of functional terms, teleology, and narrativity. These themes provide the background for MacIntyre's subsequent writing and reemerge in his latest book, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), where emotivism goes by its up-to-date designation, "expressivism."

will help us reinterpret our moral predicament and direct our attention to the underlying causes. To make good on this claim, I will first examine the psychological mechanisms Kant adduces to explain epistemic and moral failures in general—for I take emotivism to be just a member of this larger class (§§ IV–VII). I will then proceed to account for why Kant thought such failures were so prevalent in the contemporary world (§ VIII).

–IV–

For Kant, error in all its forms (theoretical and practical) arises from a confusion between subjective and objective grounds of judgment. As is the case with emotivism, Kant thinks that this confusion results from processes of surreptitious reasoning: by putting our rational faculties to work at the service of extraneous subjective interests, we persuade ourselves to *hold to be true* what we *want to believe*—not what we are justified to assent to. Locke’s dictum elegantly captures the point: “*quod volumus, facile credimus; what suits our wishes, is forwardly believed.*”¹⁶⁴

In cognitive matters, the conflation of grounds occurs by allowing sensibility to have undue influence on the understanding. On their own, Kant believes, these faculties are faultless: the understanding provides laws for thinking, sensibility the material for thought. Error arises in their connection, and hence in the *judgement* which determines whether something stands under a given rule or not. Kant envisions two possibilities:

Sensibility, subordinated to understanding, as the object to which the latter applies its function, is the source of real cognition. But this same sensibility, insofar as it influences the action of the understanding and determines its judgments, is the ground of error. (A194/B351n)¹⁶⁵

It would be wrong to blame sensibility for this pernicious influence: “error cannot arise from sensibility in and by itself because the senses simply do not judge” (L 9:53). Yet

¹⁶⁴ See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford University Press, 1975), Book IV, chap. 20, 715.

¹⁶⁵ Citations to Kant will be to the *Akademie Ausgabe* by volume and page, except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where I use the standard A/B edition pagination. English quotations will be from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, general editors Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. I use the following abbreviations: *Jäsche Logic* (L), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (G), *Critique of Practical Reason* (KpV), *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (KU), *Metaphysics of Morals* (MS), *Perpetual Peace* (EF), and *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (R).

equally wrong would be to consider error an innocent mistake, a simple misapplication of the understanding's rules. For, Kant believes, error demands a certain complicity on our part: "We are misled into this by our own inclination to judge and to decide even where, on account of our limitedness, we are not able to judge and to decide" (L 9:54). That is, the influence of inclination is not fortuitous: it requires our willful inattentiveness, our active disregard of the functions of the respective faculties. For, just as sensibility is not the source of error, neither is error the result of the "restrictions of the understanding, in which lies the cause of *ignorance*" (L 9:53). Error requires their collusion, i.e., it arises out of the understanding's willingness to be persuaded by sensibility to disregard its proper use:

In a certain sense (. . .) one can make the understanding the author of errors, namely, insofar as it allows itself to be misled by the illusion arising therefrom into holding merely subjective determining grounds of judgment to be objective, or into letting that which is true only according to the laws of sensibility hold as true in accordance with its own laws. (L 9:54)

Kant's conception hinges then on two complementary theses: errors are not defective but deceptive, and such deception is self-induced. It is we who *author* the errors, and this authorship requires our adopting a falsehood *as* a truth. Dissembling is necessary, for, as a matter of brute psychological fact, Kant thinks that if a falsehood were recognized to be such, it could not possibly persuade us to adopt it. In such instances, "[t]he will does not have any influence immediately on holding-to-be-true" (L 9:73); otherwise, "we would constantly form for ourselves chimeras of a happy condition, and always hold them to be true, too" (L 9:74). But this lack of influence, Kant proceeds to add, must be qualified: although the will cannot erase the difference between wish and reality, it has the freedom to blur their boundaries. It does not do so *directly*, by forcing our assent to a falsity we are aware of. Such a strategy, Kant realizes, would be stillborn, since it requires us to simultaneously hold to be true two contradictory beliefs, and this is something no rational being could do.¹⁶⁶ To exert an influence,

¹⁶⁶ In the contemporary literature on self-deception, this problem is often referred to as the "static paradox" (for a survey on current discussions, see Alfred Mele, "Recent Work on Self-Deception," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 24: 1–17). The paradox arises by applying to self-deception the model of interpersonal deception, where the deceived and the deceiver are two different persons. As Kant puts it in the *Metaphysics of Morals*: "It is easy to show that man is guilty of many **inner** lies, but it seems more difficult to explain how they are possible; for a lie requires a second person whom one

therefore, the will must resort to more subtle tactics: it has to affect our judgment *indirectly*. It does so, Kant argues, by creating conditions which make the difference between truth and falsehood, wish and reality, much harder to see. There is plenty of freedom here to operate in a roundabout way, for, “[i]nsofar as the will either impels the understanding toward inquiry into truth or holds it back therefrom, (. . .) one must grant it an influence *on the use of the understanding*, and hence mediately on conviction itself” (L 9:74).

This subtle, indirect obfuscation of boundaries is at the heart of the Kantian conception of error. For we are no longer dealing here with a straightforward falsehood (the holding-to-be-true of which would be contradictory and irrational), but with a falsehood disguising itself as a truth. As Kant puts it: the concept of error “contains as an essential mark, besides falsehood, also the illusion of truth (*Schein der Wahrheit*)” (L 9:55). It is the lure of that illusion that befuddles our judgment and triggers our assent. Yet, and this is crucial, for the assent to be possible the agent cannot see the illusion as an illusion: the falsehood contained therein must be invisible to the one who holds it.

Vigilance is not enough to avoid the deception, for, given Kant’s psychological assumptions, the illusion must do its work underground, below the threshold of consciousness. Its maneuvers cannot be detected by introspection, for a strategy known to be deceitful would be doomed from the start:¹⁶⁷

intends to deceive, whereas to deceive oneself on purpose seems to contain a contradiction” (MS 6:430). In the reading of self-deception I propose, the Kantian notion of “illusion of truth” completely sidesteps this problem: the motive inducing the belief (the wish for it to be true) creates the epistemic and affective conditions that prevent an agent to distinguish truth from illusion, and thus ensure that she will not experience a contradiction between what she desires and the way the world is. Such an agent does not recognize that she lacks sufficient reasons to hold her wishes to be true, and hence never assents to what she *sees* as a falsehood.

¹⁶⁷ This problem is nowadays referred to as the “dynamic” or “strategic” paradox: to intentionally make oneself believe something one knows to be false puts the self-deceiver in an impossible bind, namely, to both deploy and be duped by a strategy she knows to be deceitful. In order to avoid this paradox, so called “intentionalist” philosophers (Donald Davidson is a paradigmatic example) propose some kind of psychological partitioning—a strategy which allows deceiver and deceived to be represented as “semi-autonomous parts of the mind,” each holding one of the contradictory beliefs and thus avoiding juxtaposition. So-called “deflationists” philosophers like Alfred Mele, on the other hand, construe self-deception on the model of motivated belief and do away with the “intention to deceive” altogether. According to this view, our *wanting* something to be true has an influence on what we believe and how we go about gathering evidence to corroborate it. As it will become clear below, Kant does not squarely fall in either of these camps. His account is hybrid and straddles both approaches: it incorporates the notion of coexisting parts (in a move resembling Davidson’s partition) but also subscribes to the idea of unconscious bias and motivated belief (in agreement with Mele). The unconscious character of the bias does not exculpate the agent who holds it, for error could not take place without her colluding in her own deception—the “intention” to deceive or lack thereof are beside the point. See Donald Davidson, “Deception and Division,” in *Problems of Rationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004, 199–212), and Alfred Mele, “Real Self-Deception,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 20 (1997): 91–102.

The ground for the origin of all error will therefore have to be sought simply and solely in the *unnoticed influence of sensibility upon the understanding*, or to speak more exactly, upon *judgment*. This influence, namely, brings it about that in judgment we take merely *subjective* grounds to be *objective*, and consequently confuse *the mere illusion of truth with truth itself*. For it is just in this that the essence of illusion consists, which on this account is to be regarded as a ground for holding a false cognition to be true. (L 9:53–4)

–V–

A similar pattern can be found in the practical domain, albeit with a different set of characters. The place of sensible intuition is here occupied by inclination, while the rules of the understanding are replaced by the categorical imperative of reason. Yet, in all cases, Kant contends that human beings, unbeknown to themselves, set in motion complex stratagems of self-deception: they manipulate evidence, selectively marshal grounds, silence or ignore testimony, engage in confirmation bias, find exceptions to rules they know should apply to themselves, and misinterpret data in light of their emotional state. This impressive (yet incomplete) list of hoaxes indicates that self-deception is not irrational, but a failure within the citadel of reason, i.e., an instance of what Kant sometimes calls “rationalizing” (*vernünfteln*). Reason in those instances turns against its intended purpose—in a way that is unnoticed by the agent but nonetheless culpable, for the misuse of one’s faculties could not take place without one’s active involvement and cooperation.¹⁶⁸

A good example of this phenomenon can be found in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, where we are introduced to a lover who wishes “to find only good qualities in his beloved” and “blinds [himself] to her obvious faults” (MS 6:430). With an intensity proportional to the importance of this love affair to his self-conception, the infatuated lover does not merely *want*, but also *needs* his wishes to be true. Were his confidence in the beloved shaken at some point, he would do everything in his power to search for grounds to reestablish it, eagerly discounting any objection. Although far from perfect, the beloved is not devoid of attractive qualities, evidence of which allows him to hold

¹⁶⁸ For a reading of self-deception along similar lines, see Laura Papish, *Kant on Evil, Self-Deception, and Moral Reform* (Oxford University Press, 2018, chapter 3, 67–83. Papish defines rationalization as “a misappropriation of our cognitive powers to the detriment of reason’s true or final ends” (73–4).

intact, and in good conscience, the illusion of her perfection. He will do so without a shade of self-doubt, for he does not cling to a picture he has painted out of whole cloth, but carefully assembled one that fits his interests.

While avoiding outright fabrication (a patent falsehood he could not assent to), the lover creates the conditions under which his illusion can thrive. He never flagrantly violates the principles of belief formation (he is not irrational) but engages in a project of emphasis and elimination that allows him to fancy himself as following strict evidentiary standards—no matter that the evidence he relies on is woefully partial and selective, tailored to justify what he wants to believe. Most importantly, he must render himself epistemically and emotionally numb toward his own doings, for if he suspected in the least the integrity of his inquiry, the very project would crumble. His numbness is not merely epistemic (directed to the evidence) but also affective: the lover must make himself insensitive to the distorting power of his own needs and desires—he must learn to see himself obliquely. For, if he is to persuade himself about the perfections of his beloved, he must cease to be able to discern reality from wish—all the while congratulating himself about the wisdom of his affections.¹⁶⁹

Although Kant often uses the language of “inner lie” to refer to self-deception, we have seen that such a language does not do justice to his view. There are two reasons for that. First, while a liar is aware of the truth but utters a falsehood to advance his goals, the self-deceived agent can no longer distinguish truth from falsehood. Furthermore, while a lie is inconceivable without an intention to lie, Kantian self-deception dispenses with that intention altogether. Entrapped in a hermeneutic prison of her own making, the self-deceiver has managed to “confuse *the mere illusion of truth with truth itself*” (L 9:54). This confusion, Kant believes, makes self-deception even more pernicious than lying. For while the liar “throws away (. . .) his dignity as a human being” (MS 6:429) and becomes “a speaking machine” (MS 6:430) whose utterances devalue the currency of words (for only against a background of

¹⁶⁹ In this interpretation of error, Kantian self-deception and wishful thinking differ only in degree, not in kind, for both are instances of motivated reasoning. Kant is right in claiming that we cannot make ourselves believe sheer fabrications, for “the will cannot struggle *against* convincing proofs of truths that are contrary to its wishes and inclinations” (L 9:74). But what self-deception ensures is that such contravening proofs be indefinitely delayed, deflected, deprived of their persuasive power. On this score, Kant sides with contemporary “deflationists” (Mele, “Real Self-Deception”) in clear opposition to Davidson, who maintains that to be self-deceived one must at some time “know” the truth and be able to keep it separate from illusion (Davidson 2004, “Who Is Fooled?”, 216, 227). That separation, Kant believes, is precisely what self-deception has fudged.

truthfulness can a lie achieve its goal), the self-deceiver undermines the very foundation upon which all communication is built.

No communicative exchange can take place in the world the self-deceiver inhabits, for such an agent has given up on the “external touchstone of truth,” i.e., “the comparison of [her] own judgment with those of others” (L 9:57). This comparison would have allowed her to detect error, “because the subjective will not be present in all others in the same way,” and hence “the *incompatibility* of the judgment of others” with her own would give her a “cue to investigate [her] own procedure in judgment” (L 9:57).¹⁷⁰ The self-deceiver, however, shields herself from this cue, since, strictly speaking, there are no “others” with whom to compare her judgment. Like the lover in the example, she has created the epistemic and affective conditions to ensure that there are no other agents from whose position she must learn to think, no dissent to *broaden* her understanding, no external pushback to force her to overcome her privacy.

Having ascribed to herself the monopoly of judgment and interpretation, the self-deceiver builds an invisible barrier between herself and the world—a barrier which, in turn, allows her to mistakenly believe that she *thinks for herself* (as indeed she uses her reason) and does so *consistently* (for neither dissent nor contradiction could make her change her mind). Insulated in a mode of thinking that subjects her thoughts to her feelings, she is a travesty of Kantian rationality, a parody of Kant’s famous maxims of enlightenment (L 9:57, KU 5: 294–5). Under these circumstances, just as MacIntyre observes, “debates go on and on and on” and “apparently can find no terminus” (AV, 6), for the public use of reason is here weaponized by privacy. It should not be surprising that, pernicious as lying is, Kant considered interpersonal deception to be a derivative phenomenon, an offshoot of self-deception (R 6:38). For, in order to be able to treat others as mere means (as the liar and the emotivist do), one must first have learned to render them inconsequential—an insensitivity which results from the systematic distortion of our own cognitive and emotional states, and requires the accentuations, omissions, and erasures of self-deception, i.e., the battery of tricks that allow us to use language not to express but to conceal our motives.

Truth, however, is not the only casualty of this mode of thinking. More important for Kant is the *moral* dimension that lies at the basis of error, even in

¹⁷⁰ See KrV A821/B849, where Kant resorts to the touchstone of communicability to distinguish conviction (*Überzeugung*) from persuasion (*Überredung*).

epistemic contexts. For the self-deceiver, like MacIntyre's emotivist, is unable to distinguish between "manipulative and non-manipulative social relations" (AV, 23)—a blind spot that in turn requires her ignoring the desires that underlie her desire motivated judgment. Self-deception, so construed, entails a failure in *self-knowledge* and presupposes, on the part of the agent, a thoroughgoing refusal to obey "the first command of all duties to oneself."¹⁷¹

This refusal is not simply a cautionary measure: Kant compares self-cognition with a "descent into hell" (ibid.), an excruciatingly painful experience that forces the agent to confront not only the guilt of what she has done, but also the shame of who she is. But there is at stake here more than the avoidance of pain. The self-deceiver also has a *positive* reason to refuse "to penetrate into the depths (the abyss) of her own heart" (ibid.): there is a *pleasure* to be gained by the refusal. For, as we saw with the lover, the self-deceptive stratagems that give rise to error are part of a desperate attempt, on the part of the subject, to protect something she deeply cares about, something so embedded in her identity that sacrificing it—she fears—would represent a kind of "mutilation"—a loss for which there can be no compensation. The part of our personality that expresses this fear Kant calls the "dear self (*liebe Selbst*)."¹⁷² a protector who "is always turning up" in situations that "require self-denial" (Gr 4:407). Its function is twofold: to shelter us from the pain that such sacrifices entail, and to preserve the pleasures that holding to our illusions affords.¹⁷²

–VI–

Kant, admittedly, refers to the dear self only in passing, but from what he *does say* it is clear that he conceives of it as a distinctive aspect of self-love, enlisted to devising strategies that secure a good opinion of oneself and mobilize reason to shield our illusions from rational correction. Its methods are eminently creative: the dear self not only sets up defensive mechanisms that fend us from shame and humiliation (the

¹⁷¹ Kant's insight is closely linked to the view of Dion Scott-Kakures, who claims: "Reflective reasoning paired with a certain error of self-knowledge makes for self-deception. We are at permanent risk of self-deception because, in testing hypotheses as we typically do, and in our capacity as reflective cognizers, we are unwittingly moved by desire" (599). See Dion Scott-Kakures, "At Permanent Risk': Reasoning and Self-Knowledge in Self-Deception," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 65, no. 3 (November, 2002): 576–603.

¹⁷² I introduced this conception of the "dear self" in "Healing the Wound: Rossi on Kantian Critique, Community, and the Remedies to the "Dear Self," *Philosophia*, 49 (2021): 1817–35.

unsavory fruits of moral self-cognition), but also generates the host of rationalizing techniques necessary for desire motivated reason to do its work unimpeded.

The dear self, then, should not be confused with the other dimensions of self-love Kant has in mind. It is not *solipsismus*, for the dear self is not concerned with bringing the multiplicity of inclinations “into a tolerable system (. . .) the satisfaction of which is then called one’s own happiness” (KpV 5:73)—there are no such totalizing pretensions in the dear self: its concerns are narrower and more targeted. Nor is it *philautia*, the “predominant benevolence towards oneself” that is “natural and active in us even prior to the moral law” (KpV 5:73)—the dear self is too sophisticated and cunning for that. And although it abuts *arrogantia*, i.e., the self-conceit that ascribes esteem for oneself prior to and independently from the moral law (KpV 5:73), the dear self operates over a much broader terrain: it fosters illusions wherever they arise, not merely in moral contexts. To put it bluntly: Kant construes the dear self as a quasi-independent agency, the creative force behind all instances of self-deception, whose function is (like a schema) to connect the sensible and the spontaneous parts of the human mind, but which (unlike schemata) serves to account for how the subject can upend the order Kant envisions for them. So interpreted, the dear self is a transcendental construct Kant assumes to explain how self-deception is possible.¹⁷³

We can see intimations of the dear self in the prosaic forms of error Kant dubs “prejudices” (*Vorurteile*) in the *Logic*. These are important for our discussion because prejudices are not mere errors, but errors based on principles (L 9:75) and hence the source of false beliefs that can be shared by like-minded subjects.¹⁷⁴ The collective

¹⁷³ Kant’s partitioning of the mind into semi-autonomous structures that interact with one another is analogous to Donald Davidson’s strategy to account for self-deception. The differences between them, however, could not be more pronounced. For, while Davidson conceives of self-deception as a case of irrationality and uses the different parts of the mind to account for “mental state causes that are not reasons for the mental states they cause” (Davidson, “Deception and Division,” 184), Kant conceives of self-deception as *corrupted reason*, and hence dodges the problem of irrationality that haunts Davidson. In the Kantian story, there is no need to account for the “non-logical causal relations between the parts” (185), for the dear self is a corrupting rational agency whose actions make us unable to distinguishing truth from illusion. This reading seems to make Kant a deflationist *avant la lettre*. But again, the label is ill-fitting, for deflationists would cringe at the thought of transcendental structures that populate the mind with “mental exotica.” Kant’s approach is original and eclectic: it both prefigures and transcends the narrow terms of contemporary debates. See Donald Davidson, “Paradoxes of Irrationality,” and Mele, “Real Self-Deception.”

¹⁷⁴ Kant mentions, for example, the “prejudices of prestige,” in which deference to the authority of another person, the multitude or the assumptions of one’s age serve to cover up the anxieties and fears of those who embrace them (L9:78–80). One can see a similar mechanism replicated with uncanny consistency in instances of racism, where, as Charles Mills eloquently puts it: “the officially sanctioned reality is divergent from actual reality. So here, it could be said, one has an agreement to misinterpret the world. One has to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority (. . .) Thus, in effect, on matters related to

nature of these cognitions works as its most effective defense mechanism: it creates what we now call “echo chambers,” which the misuse of the external touchstone of truth only helps reinforce. By surrounding ourselves with those who share our principles, we deprive ourselves of hearing the objections that would enable us to see what is wrong with those principles. Echo chambers thus define the boundaries of what emotivists described as the mimetic power of feelings (section I), where the subjective hides itself under the cloak of objectivity by becoming *intersubjective*—a masterful disguise.

But the dear self’s talents are not limited to camouflage: its repertoire also includes tactics to abet phantasies we do not want to forfeit. This is nowhere clearer in the epistemic domain than in “transcendental illusions,” where “the subjective necessity of a certain connection of our concepts on behalf of the understanding is taken for an objective necessity, the determination of things in themselves” (KrV A297/B353). Here, the natural desire of our reason to *know* the unconditioned tempts us to forget our cognitive limitations and feign to be God. Unlike the *discretionary* fantasies of the lover or a wishful thinker, transcendental illusions are inscribed in the nature of human reason, i.e., they are *mandatory* fantasies for a finite rationality like ours. Although the self-knowledge of critique can expose them, it does not remove their allure. A “transcendental illusion does not cease even though it is uncovered” (KrV A 297/B 353), since what generates it is not an arbitrary whim, but our natural predisposition (*Anlage*) to metaphysics, a tendency we may discipline and train but cannot do without. The dear self comes to satisfy the desire that motivates this tendency, promising a pleasure finite creatures cannot enjoy—the illusory pleasure of extending our understanding and communing, by means of pure intellectual intuition, with the mind of God.

The same temptation to play God can be seen in the practical domain. At the end of *Groundwork* I, for example, the dear self puts reason at the service of a pain-avoidance strategy whose goal is to protect us from the unavoidable collision between

race, [one learns to adopt] an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made” (See Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Cornell University Press, 1997, 18)). This characterization can be easily extended to apply to cases of misogyny, homophobia, and xenophobia—all of which a contemporary Kant would recognize as “products of the dear self,” no matter what the historical Kant might say to the contrary. As I see it, Kant’s conception of error contains useful analytic tools to understanding not just emotivism, but also the etiology of other social pathologies that afflict us today. This is a claim which, unfortunately, I cannot develop here.

the sensible demands of our happiness and the rational demands of duty—each expressing the interest of an essential, yet incommensurably different part of our finite nature. Self-deception is deployed here to conceal the pain of such a clash, the anxiety of choice and forfeiture, by creating the illusion that our pathologically determined self is identical with our whole moral personality. This illusion contains the promise of wholeness, the expectation of perfect self-sufficiency that belongs to God, a being who does not need to attend to the difference between what is objectively and subjectively necessary, for it follows reason infallibly, without necessitation (G 4:412). Seamless obedience to the moral law (the practical equivalent of intellectual intuition), however, is not possible for us, divided creatures that we are. To maintain the fantasy of holiness, therefore, the dear self taps into a preexisting tendency to which human beings are ready to yield, namely, their “propensity (*Hang*) to rationalize (*vernünftlen*) against those strict laws of duty and to cast doubt upon their validity, or at least upon their purity and strictness, and, where possible, to make them better suited to our wishes and inclinations, that is, to corrupt them at their basis and to destroy all their dignity” (Gr 4:405). This propensity is the source of what Kant calls a “natural dialectic,” which the critique of practical reason can, once again, help us expose and control (provided it overcomes the resistance of that other side of our rationality that is caught red-handed in the act of self-deception), but cannot eradicate.

–VII–

It should be clear by now, I hope, that Kant’s whole psychology of error bears a strong family resemblance with the volitional structure he calls “radical evil” in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Resemblance, of course, is not identity: the two phenomena differ both in outcome and scope. While radical evil is a propensity (*Hang*) Kant attributes to the whole human species, “even the best” of us (R 6:32), he uses error to designate localized forms of epistemic and moral dysfunction (wishful thinking, prejudices, transcendental illusions, the natural dialectic, etc.). Although any reflective subject could, in principle, avoid the pitfalls of error, Kant thinks that none is exempt from the propensity to evil. Furthermore, while error produces a desire motivated picture of the world, in radical evil that picture spills into praxis—it *makes a world*, it does not merely *think* it.

Yet, these differences pale in comparison with what the two notions have in common: they are both offspring of self-deception. The common ancestry is revealed

by their *modus operandi*: the inversion of the ethical order of priority between incentives, by which we make self-love “the condition of compliance with the moral law” (R 6:36), is the practical counterpart of the inversion of the order of priority between subjective and objective grounds of judgment, by which we sacrifice truth to illusion (A194/B351n.). In both cases, the inversion requires us to “throw dust in our own eyes” (R 6:38) and to adopt a mode of thinking “corrupted at its root” (R 6:30). For just as error could neither be ascribed to sensibility nor be assented to if it presents itself as a falsehood, Kant argues that our “[s]ensuous nature (. . .) contains too little to provide a ground of moral evil in the human being, (. . .) [and] a reason exonerated from the moral law, an *evil reason* as it were (an absolutely evil will), would contain too much, because resistance to the law would itself be thereby elevated to an incentive” (R 6:35). Our will is not *diabolical*: we cannot choose evil for evil’s sake. Evil must be done—if done at all—*sub specie boni*, under the guise of the good; and, to the extent that our understanding is not *mendacious* either, the same holds for error, which operates *sub specie veritatis*, and hence must present a falsehood under the guise of the true. Behind the holding-to-be-good of an evil, and the holding-to-be-true of a falsehood, one can see the underhanded maneuvers of the dear self.

What Kant finds most troubling about evil, as he did with error, is its self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating character. For, the inversion of the ethical order of priority between incentives entails that an evil agent will refuse to “resist the inclinations when they invite transgression” (R 6:58n.). She will obey the moral law on the condition that its commands do not interfere with her happiness, and if a clash is unavoidable, the dear self will find reasons to persuade her that her happiness should have the last word. “If we (...) attend to ourselves in any transgression of a duty,” Kant tells us, “we find that we do not really will that our maxim should become a universal law, since that is impossible for us, but that the opposite of our maxims should instead remain a universal law, only we take the liberty of making an *exception* to it for ourselves (or just for this once) to the advantage of our inclination” (G 4:424).

By granting herself moral exceptions she no longer sees as exceptions, the evil agent manages to feel justified, in her own eyes, to take her desires and inclinations as a sufficient reason for action. For, she has made her subjective feelings of pleasure and displeasure the measure of all things, allowing her self-love to displace practical reason from its sovereign position. In so doing, the evil agent turns the demands of moral objectivity, if not into something irrelevant, at least into a nuisance she could

rationalize away. For she is, at her core, like those emotivists MacIntyre so vehemently detests, an agent who, with few scruples and but a fleeting sting of conscience, calls “good” whatever she pleases.

–VIII–

If this reading is correct, Kant’s twin notions of error and radical evil provide a general conceptual framework to understand the contemporary moral situation MacIntyre describes at the beginning of *After Virtue*. For, seen with a Kantian lens, the emotivist self is a historically contingent articulation of these phenomena, an instance of a more widespread tendency human beings have to invest their sensibility with motivational power, bend their reason to serve their subjective interests, and maintain throughout the process a good opinion of themselves. My claim has been that Kant’s moral psychology not only sheds light on the volitional structure and *modus operandi* of this type of selfhood, but also explains (by means of the “dear self”) how it is itself possible. About these matters MacIntyre has little to say—hence my desire to put him in conversation with Kant.

To bring this dialogue to a close, however, there is still a question we need to address: Why did Kant think that this frame of mind was so prevalent in the modern world? What specific features of the *modern* political condition allow bad faith to prosper? These are large questions I could only tackle in cursory fashion here. But let me offer the gist of an answer. The key lies, I believe, in what is perhaps the most disconcerting aspect of Kant’s conception of radical evil, namely, the thesis that immorality is perfectly compatible with the legality of our actions:

So far as the agreement of actions with the law goes, however, there is no difference (or at least there ought to be none) between a human being of good morals (*bene moratus*) and a morally good human being (*moraliter bonus*), except that the actions of the former do not always have, perhaps never have, the law as their sole and supreme incentive, whereas those of the latter always do. We can say of the first that he complies with the law according to the *letter* (i.e. as regards the action commanded by the law); but of the second, that he observes it according to the *spirit* (the spirit of the moral law consists in the law being of itself a sufficient incentive). Whatever is not of this faith is sin (in attitude). (R 6:30)

The example of the shopkeeper in the *Groundwork* makes it clear: it is generally good for business to charge all customers a fair price, even when one could take advantage of them with impunity, for in contemporary society a reputation for honesty is necessary for commercial success (G 4:397). But this fragile and purely contingent overlap between self-love and the prescriptions of duty teaches a *wolf of man* to walk *in sheep's clothing*. Far from reducing the perils of overt violence and aggression, the social advantages of concealment make this seemingly peaceable creature even more dangerous than its counterpart in the state of nature: with the latter, at least, we knew where we stood.

To put things roughly: the fundamental moral threat in modern life, Kant realized, lies neither in violence nor in war (*à la* Hobbes), nor in the unfairness of the basic structure of society (*à la* Rawls), nor in the many ways we inflict cruelty on one another (*à la* Rorty); it lies, rather, in the fact that private vices contribute to public virtues (*à la* Mandeville). We have reached this situation as a result of the consolidation of the coercive power of the state, a process that turns human beings into shrewd creatures, efficient in hiding their deepest immorality under the illusion of virtue (*Tugendschein*) and present their evil *sub specie boni*. “Within each state,” Kant explains in *Perpetual Peace*, malevolence “is veiled by the coercion of civil laws, for the citizen’s inclination to violence against each other is powerfully counteracted by a greater force, namely that of government, and so (. . .) [gives] the whole a moral veneer” (EF 8:375 n.).

The Kantian insight, I take it, is that under modern political conditions, one can be a *good citizen* and remain an *evil person*—a tension which does not disappear even when the exercise of state power follows the guidelines of the general will and citizens have the freedom to engage in the *public* use of reason. For, such a freedom can yield fruits only if those who engage in it are willing to embrace “the external touchstone of truth,” and this is precisely what the logic of error, evil, and self-deception put into question. The liberal assumptions about the moralizing power of rational deliberation and its capacity to secure consensus, for both MacIntyre and Kant, beg the fundamental question.

It is undeniable that, in the abstract, Kant saw in the modern state a vehicle of moral progress, just as liberalism imagines it to be. He recognized that, by “checking the outbreak of unlawful inclinations,” the state can facilitate “the development of the

moral predisposition to immediate respect for right” (EF 8: 376 n.). But it is no less true that Kant was aware of another, darker side of modern politics—the side that liberalism refuses to confront. For just as much as the public sword is necessary to ensure property rights and a space for the free exchange of reasons, it has also trained human beings to send their unsociable tendencies deeper, inwardly, and deflect them toward socially expedient goals. Modern citizens have thus learned to give good names to their passions: ambition they call “industriousness,” greed “entrepreneurship,” lust for domination “rightful honor.” With such clever ruses, they make their self-preferential tendencies more entrenched, their self-deception more elusive. The shared nature of these values makes pursuing them effortless, the evil contained therein undetectable.

Instead of moralizing us and bringing us closer to virtue, Kant realized that the civil condition has unwittingly contributed to turn evil into an “invisible enemy, one who hides behind reason and [is] hence all the more dangerous” (R 6: 57). By tempting us to identify moral goodness with legal action, political progress seduces us into moral stupor: this is the shameful truth of modern civilization, cunningly disguised behind affluence and comfort, the social advantages which give the dear self ever more ways to maintain its grip on our volitional structure. This remarkable passage exposes the ruse:

The problem of establishing a state, no matter how hard it may sound, is *soluble* even for a nation of devils (if only they have understanding) and goes like this: ‘Given a multitude of rational beings all of whom need universal laws for their preservation but each of whom is inclined covertly to exempt himself from them, so to order this multitude and establish their constitution that, although in their private dispositions they strive against one another, these yet so check one another that in their public conduct the result is the same as if they had no such evil dispositions.’ Such a problem must be soluble. For the problem is not the moral improvement of human beings but only the mechanism of nature, and what the task requires one to know is how this can be put to use in human beings in order so to arrange the conflict of their unpeaceable dispositions within a people that they themselves have to constrain one another to submit to coercive law and so bring about a condition of peace in which laws have force. (EF 8: 366)

Modern individuals can be compared to intelligent demons who, due to the efficient use of the “mechanism of nature,” comport themselves as exemplary citizens, though never abandoning their “unpeaceable dispositions.” Politics can change how they behave but not who they are, for coercion is limited to the control of observable actions and cannot alter the ends people set, the way they feel and think about the world (MS 6:380). “[W]oe to the legislator,” Kant warns us, “who would want to bring about through coercion a polity directed to ethical ends! For he would thereby not only achieve the very opposite of ethical ends, but also undermine his political ends and render them insecure” (R 6:96).

With this warning, Kant rejects a key assumption in the contemporary liberal tradition epitomized by Rawls: the purpose of politics, Kant realized, is *not* to produce virtuous citizens, i.e., citizens who do not simply obey the law, but also develop a *sense of justice* and find in the law something to love. The purpose of politics is, rather, to *pacify* them, to use their self-love to cancel the undesirable effects of their self-love. The liberal primacy of the right over the good is for Kant a dangerous distraction, for it tempts us to confuse human flourishing with the benefits of social cooperation, to identify goodness (*das Gute*) with well-being (*das Wohl*), in short, to mistake the good with the illusion of the good.

To avoid this mistake, we must abandon the dreams of moral depth with which liberalism adorns its politics: we must accept the painful truth that politics barely scratches the surface of our motivational structure, that it is at best a propaedeutics, and that the real moral battle must be fought elsewhere. MacIntyre, I believe, would keenly endorse such a world historical view.

–IX–

Much more needs to be said about Kant’s proposal to address the shortcomings of liberal politics, the ethical community, and the role of rational religion within it. But my goal in this paper is more modest: I wanted to make friends of two presumptive philosophical foes. For, once we move beyond a superficial reading, Kant and MacIntyre share strikingly similar views about the pathologies of the contemporary moral situation and the limits of liberalism to redress the problem. Both are deeply troubled by emotivism, though they call it by different names, and both are suspicious

of the primacy of the right over the good, though the meaning of “good” and the path to achieve it differ in each case.

What Kant contributes to this *rapprochement*, I have argued, is a deeper understanding of what is wrong with the moral psychology at the basis of contemporary selfhood. This is a lesson MacIntyre misses in part because of his socio/historical approach, but in part also because of his picture of Kant as an Enlightenment hero, a defender of a project he thought was doomed from the start. Once we attend to Kant’s views on error, self-deception, and evil, however, such a facile picture must be revised. For the Enlightenment project has neither failed (as MacIntyre thought) nor has it been left behind (as some postmodernists and autocrats may think) but it has barely begun.

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Strange Bedfellows: MacIntyre and Kant on Emotivism. A Modern Response.

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MacIntyre's fundamental claim that the endless controversies about moral and political value judgments in our contemporary modern society are a consequence of the misguided project of the Enlightenment, specifically its attempt to conceive of norms of practical reasoning independently of social roles within traditions, has been widely criticized in the literature as unfair and inadequate.¹⁷⁵ MacIntyre proposes a traditionbound, contextual view of practical reasoning. As one of his commentators puts it:

MacIntyre's principal claim is that rationality—in ethics as elsewhere—is possible only within a tradition. Reasons for belief and action, he argues . . . cannot properly be thought to be recognizable by any rational being as such, since the justification of belief and action must always rely upon given commitments that are part of some particular tradition.¹⁷⁶

The claim that there are no tradition-independent standards of argument is opposed to the Enlightenment's idea of a universal, ahistorical reason that legislates norms which any rational agent as such must acknowledge. Although MacIntyre's frustration with modernity, the liberal social order, and the liberal self is not exclusively directed at Kant, but rather at the project of any universalist morality that aims at conceiving of practical rationality in the absence of specific commitments as they are embedded in particular social traditions, Muchnik's "Emotivism: A Kantian Response" attempts to bring Kant to the dialogue, in order to provide "a deeper understanding of what is wrong with the moral psychology at the basis of contemporary selfhood—a lesson MacIntyre misses because of his picture of Kant as an Enlightenment hero." Muchnik's analysis of Kant's views on error, self-deception, and radical evil are meant to show that emotivism is not merely a symptom of modernity, as MacIntyre claims, but rather

¹⁷⁵ E.g., Charles Larmore, "Whose Justice? Which Rationality? By Alasdair MacIntyre," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 86, no. 8 (August 1989): 437–42; Jeffrey Stout, "Homeward Bound: MacIntyre on Liberal Society and the History of Ethics Reviewed," *The Journal of Religion*, 69, no. 2 (April 1989): 220–32; Julia Annas, "MacIntyre on Traditions," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 18, no. 4 (Autumn 1989): 388–404.

¹⁷⁶ Larmore, "Whose Justice?," 437–8.

has its roots much deeper at the psychological level of human nature. “For, seen with a Kantian lens, the emotivist self is a historically contingent articulation of these phenomena, an instance of a more widespread tendency human beings have.”

By “emotivism” Muchnik means the widespread attitude toward moral beliefs and moral reasoning, where purely subjective interests lie at the basis of moral values, and where, yet, at the same time, it is collectively pretended that those interests are not at stake, that, rather, “objectivity and reason” determine our deliberation. For Muchnik, the dominant moral climate of our culture is one where we *pretend* to use reason, where in fact we only express our attitude. What is more, we are often ignorant about this fact about ourselves. To shed further light on this feature, Muchnik draws our attention to how Kant sees self-deception and radical evil as a universal human tendency, and not merely as the product of modern liberalism, as MacIntyre wants to have it. In other words, Muchnik accepts MacIntyre’s description of emotivism as a symptom of modernity, but then attempts to offer a deeper explanation, at the level of moral psychology, of what leads to emotivism.

Muchnik’s paper adds to the already existing literature that criticizes MacIntyre’s wholesale blame of the Enlightenment by showing how much MacIntyre’s project has in common with Kant’s. I applaud Muchnik’s attempt to put two apparently strange bedfellows into conversation. His ingenuity and combinational creativity help his readers reflect on the deeply troubling aspects of contemporary moral/political discourse in the United States. However, while I share Muchnik’s aesthetic preference for strange bedfellows, I come to quite different conclusions than Muchnik, who has “misgivings about [MacIntyre’s] dismissal of Kant.” My main concerns are twofold.

First, for MacIntyre, there is an emotivist conundrum, which Muchnik accepts at “face value.” He accepts MacIntyre’s description of the contemporary moral situation as insightful, and uses MacIntyre as a “springboard” to tell the Kantian side of the story, i.e., Muchnik wants to use Kant to understand the moral psychology underlying the emotivist mode of thinking and feeling. Finally, he claims that MacIntyre misses this Kantian lesson because of his picture of Kant as an Enlightenment hero. I find this argument unconvincing. Why? Well, what is the “springboard”? What is the “story” of which Kant provides the “other side”? Answer: Emotivism as MacIntyre conceives of it. I will argue that MacIntyre’s diagnosis is questionable and that insofar as the motivation for Muchnik’s article comes from accepting MacIntyre’s diagnosis of emotivism, Muchnik’s article loses much of its

motivation. More precisely, MacIntyre claims that the emotivist self manipulates others (and itself) because its self-conception is hopelessly fragmented. Because Muchnik takes MacIntyre's version of emotivism as a starting point, he takes on the burden of not taking into consideration that there are, obviously, other forms of emotive self-conceptions, other, *more optimistic* ways of telling the story about the fragmented self of modern liberalism—Richard Rorty's philosophy being a case in point. In other words, if you use MacIntyre's notion of emotivism as a "springboard," it might break: domination and manipulation of others, as well as self-deception and "hopeless" fragmentation of the self, are possible but not necessary consequences of an emotivist self-conception. So, I find the starting point of the debate unconvincing. However, the project of deepening MacIntyre's "insights" is not only misguided, because his insights are questionable.

My second concern is the following: Muchnik's paper argues that there is a way in which we can see some Kantian insights as actually compatible with and deepening MacIntyre's critical diagnosis of emotivism in a way that might surprise MacIntyre. This argument would require, in my view, a fair presentation of MacIntyre's reasons for rejecting Kant as well as an understanding of how he arrives at his negative assessment of the emotivist self of modern liberalism (which Muchnik does not provide). It is of course legitimate to use another philosopher's position as a springboard at "face value" without analyzing their position, but subsequently criticizing them for missing a lesson seems unfair. My analysis of MacIntyre's emotivism will show that (a) the Kantian material is not so compatible with MacIntyre as Muchnik assumes when he aims at providing a "deeper" understanding of emotivism, and (b) the Kantian material is not a likely solution to the emotivist predicament in liberal society. In my view, the main obstacles for making Kant a fruitful interlocutor are his transcendental idealist commitments: Kant's focus on inner motives, in the context of the universal human capacity for personhood, which Muchnik proposes as the key for overcoming "emotivism . . . and other social pathologies," presupposes a metaphysics that MacIntyre could not accept and that is neither necessary nor useful for contemporary public discourse. Here I have in mind, for example, the general Kantian claim that the source of normativity lies in something noncontingent called reason, i.e., appealing to tradition-independent standards that are allegedly opposed to empirical desires of the "dear self"—the latter playing an important role in Muchnik's analysis. The many dualisms of transcendental idealism,

the fragmentation of the human mind into various intellectual and sensible faculties, such that a schematism is required “to connect the sensible and spontaneous parts of the human mind,” make Kant the wrong person to get us out of the emotivist conundrum.

1. Is There an Emotivist Conundrum?

Muchnik writes:

I want to . . . accept MacIntyre’s diagnosis of contemporary society at face value and interpret emotivism as a *symptom* of the ailments of modernity, as expression of a moral self-conception dominant in our culture. For, if MacIntyre is right and emotivism is not a blip in the history of ethics but a sign of a social pathology, a set of fundamental questions can be raised: What kind of selfhood underlies the emotivist mode of thinking? . . . What are the social and political conditions that make it so prevalent in the contemporary world?

Muchnik claims that Kant has important things to say about the moral psychology that makes emotivism possible. For, interpreted in Kantian fashion, emotivism is an instance of the more general phenomena Kant identified with “error” and “radical evil.” I wonder: Why should we accept MacIntyre’s description of emotivism as deceptive and manipulative? Do we have to think of emotivism as treating people as mere means? Can emotivism not also be compatible with treating people as ends? Wouldn’t Richard Rorty’s philosophy be an example of this?

MacIntyre mentions Rorty in his “Whose Justice? Which Rationality?”¹⁷⁷ Unfortunately, he does not discuss Rorty’s position, nor that of any other liberal writer, which is regrettable, given that the last chapters of his 1988 book are dedicated to the criticism of the liberal tradition. In keeping with good Socratic fashion, let me thus briefly try to make MacIntyre’s opponent (modern liberalism, emotivism, the liberal self) a little bit stronger than MacIntyre does, so that we have a more fruitful exchange of ideas.

As a general philosophical position, emotivism holds that all my value judgments are rooted in my individual history, my contingent practical identity, which

¹⁷⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 346.

lacks an ultimate rational justification. Aesthetic, moral, and political beliefs are not capable of truth or falsehood; rather, they express my attitudes, rooted in my contingent commitments, and as such are not rationally challengeable from a “disinterested” point of view, for such an impartial point of view does not exist. For the emotivist self-understanding, there is no overriding good that everyone must accept. Rather, individual *preferences* are the ultimate data of practical rationality.¹⁷⁸ MacIntyre writes: Given the multitude of

spheres within each of which some good is pursued: political, economic, familial, artistic, athletic, scientific . . . different kinds of evaluation, each independent of the other, are exercised in these different types of social environment. The heterogeneity is such that no overall ordering of goods is possible. . . . The liberal self then is one that moves from sphere to sphere, compartmentalizing its attitudes.¹⁷⁹

For MacIntyre, in the absence of desire-independent standards, the dominant culture of liberalism is one of “bargaining between individuals, each with their own preferences.”¹⁸⁰ The marketplace of capitalism (and the assumption of methodological individualism in the science of economics) is the epitome of the liberal self-conception, where each individual person “reasons,” this is, *bargains*, as an individual in order to maximize the realization of her preferences. Since preferences are the rock bottom of practical rationality in liberal societies, as MacIntyre understands them, “nonrational persuasion displaces rational argument. [Different] standpoints are construed as the expressions of attitude and feeling.”¹⁸¹ For MacIntyre, this “increasingly emotivist culture”¹⁸² is a threat.

But does it have to be? Rorty, or contemporary artists such as Ai Wei Wei, agree with the contextualist notion of rationality that underlies emotivism, but they would not say that self-deception, deception of others, and manipulation are necessary consequences of our contingent identities. Rorty does not *pretend* to have objective reasons to persuade you.

¹⁷⁸ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 339.

¹⁷⁹ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 337.

¹⁸⁰ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 338.

¹⁸¹ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 343.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

Dewey thought, as I now do, that there was nothing bigger, more permanent and more reliable, behind our sense of moral obligation to those in pain than a certain contingent historical phenomenon—the gradual spread of the sense that the pain of others matters, regardless of whether they are of the same family, tribe, colour, religion, nation or intelligence as oneself. This idea, Dewey thought, cannot be shown to be true by science, or religion or philosophy—at least if “shown to be true” means “capable of being made evident to anyone, regardless of background.” It can only be made evident to people whom it is not too late to acculturate into our own particular, late-blooming, historically contingent form of life.¹⁸³

For Rorty, the fact that the pain of human beings matters is a culturally successful convention, a feature of our historically contingent form of life, which has prospered in liberal democracies and which now shapes our sense of moral obligation.¹⁸⁴ For Rorty, emotivism holds that none of the aesthetic, moral, and political judgments that human beings make are expressions of “the voice of reason,” rather, all are expressions of our different, fragmented, and often incompatible contingent commitments, where these commitments and the implicit norms that govern them determine which arguments we find persuasive and which ones not. The fact that there are no desire-independent reasons in emotivism does not automatically entail manipulation or deception. The basic position of emotivism, i.e., the view that value judgments only express my attitudes, that no standard independently of my and my opponent’s practical identity can settle disputes, is very much consistent with values such as transparency, sympathy, fairness, democracy, decency, tolerance, and good-heartedness, all of which are contingent values. Think of Rorty’s notion of irony. It simply does not follow, as Macintyre thinks, that I use people as mere means when I try to change the way they think in the absence of conclusive reasons. Trying to move other people to adopt my own view does not necessarily imply that I aim at exploiting them for my own advantage. There’s nothing inherently wrong with changing people’s

¹⁸³ Richard Rorty, “Trotsky and the Wild Orchids,” in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 3–20, 14. Note that Rorty’s version of pragmatism is not aimed at truth. Rorty’s notions of “sentimental education,” “sympathy,” “philosophy as poetry,” and “irony,” make him a meta-ethical non-cognitivist—even though Rorty rejects the label “emotivism” for his philosophy. On this point, see Richard Rorty, “Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality,” in *Truth and Progress. Philosophical Papers. Volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 167–86, 176–7, 180–1. And Richard Rorty, “Ethics Without Principles,” in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (Penguin Books, 1999), 72–90, 80f., 84f.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Richard Rorty, “Rationality and Cultural Difference,” in *Truth and Progress. Philosophical Papers, Volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 186–210, 189–91.

views by exposing them to other aesthetic, moral or political possibilities. Think of any aesthetic discourse where a friend tries to change your world view such that you can appreciate a work of art that you have hitherto judged as uninteresting and not worth your attention.

Thus, MacIntyre describes only one possible variant of emotivism, namely, the one where aesthetic, moral, and political discourse take the “appearance of impersonal argumentative” deliberation but are only the expression of our preferences *forcing* our wills on others. Think of Chomsky’s “manufactured consent,” i.e., the idea to use *misinformation* to persuade others in such a way that they derive pleasure from pursuing the “goods” associated with those “manufactured” beliefs, where those pleasures can be seen as diametrically opposed to their true interest: e.g., those who would most benefit from universal health care voting against it. This is an example where we could say that, obviously, the value judgment “this is good” cannot be accounted for through “I like this,” because beliefs can be the product of deception and self-deception, coercion, misinformation, bad faith lacking all responsibility or self-expression. But the problem does not lie in emotivism *per se*, but rather, depending on the case, in deception, self-deception, coercion, misinformation, bad faith, lack of responsibility and self-expression, or lack of willingness to frame a problem in terms of the vocabulary of one’s opponents (ironically, MacIntyre’s treatment of liberalism being a case in point, for, if he would also treat liberalism in terms of, say, Rorty’s terminology, he might come to different conclusions).

Reading MacIntyre’s account of emotivism, I can’t help to think of Plato’s cave or, more fitting for the twenty-first century, a news algorithm that only feeds you news based on your preferences such that you end up in your personalized information bubble. News that is exclusively based on your interests and preferences results in misinformation and manipulation because it excludes various alternative perspectives. For example, you can easily see how news based on preferences can lead a person to believe that the last election was stolen from Trump. From this perspective, the self-conception underlying emotivism, which assumes that settling controversies can only be done by influencing others’ attitudes and feelings, is indeed a danger. But MacIntyre’s Platonic version of the dangers of emotivism, where “persuasion displaces rational argument” and “the ruling elites . . . are thus bound to value highly competence in the persuasive presentation of alternatives, that is, *in the cosmetic*

*arts*¹⁸⁵ (note the reference to Plato and the Sophists!),¹⁸⁶ is not the only angle on emotivism. For sure, to Plato, the fragmented self of a modern individual would be a nightmare. But it does not follow that a fragmented self must disguise or repress the lack of unity to itself, as MacIntyre thinks, providing narratives of itself that falsify the “psychologically disabling” lack of unity.¹⁸⁷ This might follow from a Platonic view on emotivism. But for Rorty, emotivism is compatible with building meaningful lives (think of Rorty’s contingency of selfhood paper or think of Galen Strawson’s arguments against unified narratives of the self).¹⁸⁸ For these modern liberal thinkers, a divided self, where various projects and norms *cannot* be consistently rank ordered, is not necessarily something that needs to be cured. Nor is the “ineradicability of disagreement” and “interminability” of controversies necessarily a bad thing. For Plato and Kant it certainly is. But as MacIntyre rightly observes, “in the eyes of some liberals [it is] a kind of virtue.”¹⁸⁹ In the absence of an open-minded Socratic dialogue between MacIntyre and a proponent of emotivism in terms of the vocabulary a liberal self would employ, it is hard to accept the thesis that emotivism is a conundrum.

It strikes me that MacIntyre’s frustration with emotivism is frustration about the egoism of individuals trying to push through their agendas, to realize their preferences as much as possible, combined with complacency and a lack of critical self-reflection and open-mindedness. Just watch the latest season of *White Lotus* on Max to get a feel for how individual preference maximizers fail to understand each other’s positions. As Muchnik puts it:

For everybody suspects, and suspects that others suspect, that purely subjective interests lie at the basis of moral values; and yet, they collectively pretend that those interests are not at stake, that objectivity and reason have the capacity to shape their beliefs and determine their actions.

¹⁸⁵ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 343–5, my emphasis.

¹⁸⁶ MacIntyre’s emotivist self is the self of “modern liberalism [which] . . . has had its anticipations in earlier cultures, most notably, . . . in some aspects of Greek political thought and practice rejected by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle but defended by, among others, certain sophists.” (MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 392)

¹⁸⁷ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 347.

¹⁸⁸ Richard Rorty, “The Contingency of Selfhood,” in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23–43. Galen Strawson, “Against Narrativity,” in *The Self?* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 63–86.

¹⁸⁹ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 335.

For MacIntyre, “the dominant shared culture of moral modernity is . . . one in which agents [most often] are unable to recognize or acknowledge this fact about themselves.”¹⁹⁰ Accordingly, Muchnik rightly emphasizes “a failure in *self-knowledge*.” However, failure in self-knowledge, manipulating others through deception and for egoistic reasons serving the “dear self,” should not be laid at the doorstep of emotivism or the liberal self. I think we should distinguish between, what I would call, *cynical* emotivism *à la* MacIntyre (because manipulation is often quite conscious, i.e., we only “pretend” that our interests are not at stake) and *self-reflective* emotivism *à la* Rorty. Thus, while Muchnik is right to highlight the spread of deception, self-deception, coercion, misinformation, lack of willingness to frame a problem in terms of the vocabulary of one’s opponents, etc., in contemporary society, what we should *not* accept yet is MacIntyre’s claim that “emotivism” is at the root of these things. We should neither accept MacIntyre’s view that emotivism *per se* is a crisis nor that our transactional instant satisfaction culture and its endless controversies is a necessary consequence of emotivism.

2. A Return to Kant?

If emotivism is a crisis, if liberal societies are in crisis, is Kant the right person to (a) better understand it and (b) get us out of it? As I understand Muchnik’s paper, both of these questions are closely connected, and so I will treat them together in this section.

My answer to the question “Can Kant help illuminate MacIntyre’s diagnosis of emotivism in a way compatible with MacIntyre’s take on the matter?” is negative for the following reasons: (i) Kant puts moral psychology before sociohistorical matters, while for MacIntyre it is the other way around. (ii) The Kantian account brings metaphysical or transcendental baggage with it that MacIntyre could not accept. In my view, this challenges Muchnik’s claim that Kantian moral psychology can complement or deepen MacIntyre’s theory. My position on the second question, “Can Kant help us address the emotivist crisis?” will be also negative because of the metaphysical/transcendental baggage of Kant’s position.

Precisely how is the moral psychology underlying radical evil the key to answer the conundrums of emotivism? If one of the problems with emotivism is that it lacks

¹⁹⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity. An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 68.

an agreed-upon standard of practical rationality, then a theory requiring metaphysical commitments like the Kantian is unlikely to overcome this conundrum. Take Muchnik's discussion of Kant's example of a lover, who being infatuated with his beloved, finds only good qualities in her, discounts any objection to uphold his self-conception, carefully assembles what fits his interest, brackets everything else, and creates conditions under which his illusion can thrive. Muchnik uses this example to show how pernicious self-deception is. The self-deceived lover, he writes, engages in

a project of emphasis and suppression that allows him to fancy himself as following strict evidentiary standards—no matter that the evidence he relies on is woefully partial and selective, tailored to justify what he wants to believe. Most importantly, he must render himself epistemically and emotionally numb towards his own doings.

This is very well put. The analogy between Kant's self-deceived lover and the members of the U.S. Congress who are epistemically and emotionally numb to their opponents' points of view (which is as entertaining in the lover's case as it is chilling in the other), provides a plausible and quite possible psychological explanation for some of the political discourse in the United States (self-conscious cynicism being another option).

I understand this analogy. But I also note that Muchnik presents it to us cleansed of any metaphysical language that Kant uses in the very same passage of the self-deceived lover, e.g., "*homo noumenon*" vs. "*homo phenomenon*."¹⁹¹ I wonder, what precisely is it in "Kant's" theory of moral psychology that provides the key to understanding emotivism once we abstract from all transcendental idealist commitments? If the "dear self" is a more general human tendency, a transcendental construct of sorts, "like a schema," as Muchnik calls it, then what makes it necessary?

Muchnik is right in emphasizing that MacIntyre's and Kant's projects have much more in common than MacIntyre wants to acknowledge: both argue for standards of practical reasoning that are independent of individual desires—Kant's standard being the moral law and MacIntyre's the communal reasoning embedded in practices. The position that denies such an independence of practical reasoning from desires Kant calls, in its broadest sense, "heteronomy" and MacIntyre "emotivism."

¹⁹¹ Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6:430.

Both authors think that subjective utility maximization that denies genuine unconditional commitments is a devastating way of *self*-understanding. From this perspective, Kant and MacIntyre are not strange bedfellows at all. They disagree on the causes of emotivism (because their philosophical projects are very different), but agree in its negative assessment. Muchnik's contribution consists in unpacking the emotivist self-conception from a Kantian perspective. For him, the problem of emotivism lies deeper in human psychology (having to do with Kant's dualism of sensibility and understanding). For Muchnik, the social structures of modernity, which MacIntyre criticizes, merely *favor* the spreading of the conundrums of our contemporary Western culture, which are ultimately rooted in our giving egoistic *self-love* precedence over the *moral law*. Note that despite the *prima facie* agreement between Kant and MacIntyre, Kant puts moral psychology before sociohistorical matters, while for MacIntyre it is the other way around. This is an important difference between Kant's and MacIntyre's frameworks. Muchnik seems to assume that both frameworks are compatible with each other, and that Kant's reference frame is more fundamental. Since he does not provide an argument for this position, let's zero in on the causes of emotivism within MacIntyre's and Kant's theories, respectively, to better understand what precisely it is that Kant adds to the debate and that MacIntyre allegedly overlooks.

For MacIntyre, the "fundamental moral situation of our own society"¹⁹² is one where moral discourse is hopelessly fragmented and divided. Why? Because norms of practical rationality only exist in traditions, which are embodied in the forms of social life. MacIntyre writes:

In discussing Greek society, I suggested what might happen when such a well-integrated form of moral life [i.e., one in which the form of life presupposes agreement on ends, one where the community is united by a coherent moral vocabulary] broke down. In our society the acids of individualism have for four centuries eaten into our moral structures, for both good and ill. But not only this: we live with the inheritance of not only one, but of a number of well-integrated moralities."¹⁹³

¹⁹² Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics. A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 266.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

So, MacIntyre's first point is that, in modernity, there is no coherent moral vocabulary. "Speaking from within my own moral vocabulary, I shall find myself bound by the criteria embodied in it. These criteria will be shared with those who speak the same moral language."¹⁹⁴ However, given the "acids of individualism," there is no agreed-on theory of what constitutes the good life for human beings, no coherent rank ordering of goods, no single but many rationalities, which leads to endless moral controversies that merely masquerade that we pursue our private wills without regard for public commitments. MacIntyre's critique of modernity follows from his contextualist conception of rationality: we can't reason in a social vacuum, i.e., independently of the standards of a moral tradition, and since "traditions differ too much in their beliefs, standards, and goals for us to expect that reasons for belief developed in one tradition can be cogent to any rational being as such,"¹⁹⁵ it follows that the manyfold compartmentalization of modern life implies the inability of justifying one's actions in terms that people who don't share my values will accept.¹⁹⁶

It is precisely here that MacIntyre is deeply concerned with Kant. For, it was Kant, "the supreme representative of the Enlightenment,"¹⁹⁷ who *un-tied* all rational justification from its contingent historical settings and made the autonomous self the only lawgiver.¹⁹⁸

The project of founding a form of social order in which individuals could emancipate themselves from the contingency and particularity of tradition by appealing to genuinely universal, tradition-independent norms . . . was and is the project of modern liberal, individualist society, . . . which began as an appeal to alleged principles of shared rationality against what was felt to be the tyranny of tradition. . . . But the history of attempts to construct a morality for tradition-free individuals, whether by an appeal to one out of several conceptions of universalizability or to one out of equally multifarious conceptions of utility or to shared intuitions or to some combination of these, has in its outcome . . . been a history of continuously unresolved disputes, so that there emerges no

¹⁹⁴ MacIntyre, *A Short History*, 268.

¹⁹⁵ Larmore, "Whose Justice?," 439.

¹⁹⁶ MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts*, 63.

¹⁹⁷ MacIntyre, *A Short History*, 190.

¹⁹⁸ MacIntyre, *A Short History*, 262.

uncontested and incontestable account of what tradition-independent morality consists in.¹⁹⁹

In MacIntyre's narrative, liberalism begins as a "repudiation of tradition in the name of abstract, universal principles of reason," then turns into socially and politically "embodied power," yet is unable to bring the debates on the nature of those universal principles to a conclusion, and thus leaves us with the mess that MacIntyre describes as the current situation of liberalism.²⁰⁰ For, "Post-Enlightenment relativism and perspectivism are . . . the negative counterpart of the Enlightenment, its inverted mirror image."²⁰¹ If you still need evidence for "the failure of Kant"²⁰² and his heirs, MacIntyre recommends to take a look at the endless debates in academic philosophy journals.²⁰³

MacIntyre holds that under conditions of modernity, the universality of Kant's moral principle turns the autonomous agent into "an arbitrary sovereign who is the author of the law that he utters. . . . The individual becomes his own final authority in the most extreme possible sense."²⁰⁴ In our liberal, individualist society, choices are not guided by any coherent moral tradition anymore. The dramatic outcome, for MacIntyre, is that we choose our moral vocabulary for contingent reasons and yet treat it as if it were "a universal prescription."²⁰⁵

For those who speak from within a given morality, the connection between fact and valuation is established in virtue of the meanings of the words they use. To those who speak from without, those who speak from within appear merely to be uttering imperatives which express their own liking and their private choices.²⁰⁶

I think we get a sense of how MacIntyre sees the connection between tradition-independent moral standpoints and emotivism in liberal societies—and how this is connected to Kant, who provides us with the "greatest" of the "attempts to construct a morality for tradition-free individuals."²⁰⁷ It is not hard to see why, for MacIntyre, emotivism is a crisis: the Enlightenment project of providing neutral, impersonal,

¹⁹⁹ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 335, 334.

²⁰⁰ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 349.

²⁰¹ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 353.

²⁰² MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 334.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ MacIntyre, *A Short History*, 262, 264.

²⁰⁵ MacIntyre, *A Short History*, 262.

²⁰⁶ MacIntyre, *A Short History*, 266.

²⁰⁷ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 334.

tradition-independent standards of rational judgment has failed, and the post-Enlightenment person responds to this “by concluding that no set of beliefs proposed for acceptance is therefore [conclusively] justifiable.”²⁰⁸ Therefore, the liberal self, in its “rootless cosmopolitanism,”²⁰⁹ lacking any coherent tradition and thus unable to find “herself at home,” speaking the “internationalized language of everywhere and nowhere,” views any particular modes of reasoning that are embedded in a tradition as a mere “masquerade,” as “disguises assumed by arbitrary will to further projects, to empower itself.”²¹⁰ The modern liberal self, which has emancipated itself from all social, cultural, and linguistic particularity—from any tradition—and is thus not able to acknowledge “standards of rational inquiry as something other than expressions of will and preference,” treats “the everyday world . . . as one of pragmatic necessities.”²¹¹ Since it “is itself one of the defining beliefs of the culture of modernity”²¹² that any aspect of any culture can be understood *without* immersion into that culture, the liberal self, freed from all coherent tradition cannot see the value judgments of its opponent in their contexts, history, and language-in-use, and so any progress regarding moral disagreements becomes thwarted.²¹³ Lacking a coherent belief system, the modern self protects its own interests by compartmentalization. It moves from “fragments of one language-in-use through the idioms of internationalized modernity to fragments of another,”²¹⁴ while not admitting to itself and others its hopeless fragmentation. Emotivism, the liberal self, the failure of the Enlightenment, and modernity are thus tightly knit together in MacIntyre’s narrative of modern liberal culture and its fundamental belief in the “inconclusiveness” of all aesthetic, moral, or political argument such that the liberal self is abandoned to her “prerational preferences.”²¹⁵

Obviously, there are other readings of Kant and the Enlightenment possible than the one MacIntyre provides, and which might not lead to the impasses of emotivism, but rather help to remedy them. It is in this spirit that Muchnik wants to use Kant to address MacIntyre’s diagnosis of emotivism. More precisely, Muchnik wants to show that emotivism is the consequence of a natural dialectic rooted in

²⁰⁸ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 395.

²⁰⁹ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 388.

²¹⁰ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 396.

²¹¹ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 395.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 385.

²¹³ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 396–400.

²¹⁴ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 397.

²¹⁵ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 400; cf. MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts*, 67.

human nature, which can be described as follows: “we persuade ourselves to *hold to be true* what we *want to believe*—not what we are justified to assent to.” The “stratagems” of our “dear self” to deceive itself such that it can hold to be true what it wants to believe include the following: we “manipulate evidence, selectively marshal grounds, silence or ignore testimony, engage in confirmation bias, find exceptions to rules they know should apply to themselves, and misinterpret data in light of their emotional state.” We also avoid the “external touchstone of truth” by avoiding “the comparison of [our] own judgment with those of others.” We do not only do this as individuals, we also do it as group members who are absorbed in various practices and their norms, which we unreflectively accept. Along these lines, Kant says that “someone already counts as good when [*her*] *evil is common to a class*,” and Muchnik comments:

The collective nature of these cognitions works as its most effective defense mechanism: it creates what we now call “echo chambers,” which the misuse of the external touchstone of truth only helps reinforce. By surrounding ourselves of those who share our principles, we become unable to see those principles as mistaken. . . . Echo chambers thus define the boundaries of what emotivists described as the mimetic power of feelings. . . . One man says “this is good”; this may influence the approval of another person, who then makes the same ethical judgment, which in turn influences another person, and so on. . . . [We] thus call “good” whatever our group happens to like.

This is very nicely put. We live in “echo chambers,” and, for MacIntyre’s liberal self, our choice of which echo chamber to live in is the expression of our arbitrary preference.²¹⁶ In an important footnote, which contains some of the most powerful insights I take from Muchnik’s paper, Muchnik writes:

One can see a similar mechanism replicated with uncanny consistency in instances of racism, where, as Charles Mills eloquently puts it: “the officially sanctioned reality is divergent from actual reality. So here, it could be said, one has an agreement to misinterpret the world. One has to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white

²¹⁶ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 396.

epistemic authority. . . .” This characterization can be easily extended to apply to cases of misogyny, homophobia, and xenophobia –all of which a contemporary Kant would have to call “products of the dear self,” no matter what the historical Kant might say to the contrary. As I see it, Kant’s conception of error contains useful analytic tools to understanding not just emotivism, but also the etiology of other social pathologies that afflict us today.

I think MacIntyre would wholeheartedly agree. Let me quote two passages. In his latest *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, MacIntyre comments on

. . . those diligent, conscientious, and complacent conformists who structure their activities so that their ends are the ends of a successful career [and who] may therefore never find reason to raise the question of whether their ends are compatible with the ends of a rational agent.²¹⁷

In his earlier *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre discusses

. . . the extent to which our consciousness of even fundamental precepts may be subverted by the distractions and corruptions of evil, so that the wrongness of a whole class of actions may cease to be evident to us.²¹⁸

I wonder whether Kantian vocabulary sheds any additional light on the phenomenon of echo chambers? Are we not rather talking about a phenomenon that Hannah Arendt tried to capture with the notion of the *banality of evil*? As Muchnik points out, for Kant, taking the dear self as a sufficient motivating ground means to commit an *error* because the capacity of “personality” as the third of the human predispositions to the good is built into our human condition.²¹⁹ By “personality,” Kant means “the idea of the moral law alone, together with the respect that is inseparable from it, . . . the idea of humanity considered wholly intellectually.”²²⁰ Within the Kantian language game, it is clear what “good” and “personality” mean: it involves the purity of motivation from the moral law. Think of the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*. However,

²¹⁷ MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts*, 212.

²¹⁸ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 331.

²¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6:27–8.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 6:28.

MacIntyre's point is that in modernity we have become disoriented with respect to precisely what counts as good. And further: "our disorientation springs . . . precisely from the Enlightenment's misguided attempt to cast reason above the contingencies of tradition."²²¹ In the absence of a particular coherent tradition, autonomous reason turns into a tyrant, an egoistic preference maximizer, whose self-conception involves no coherent commitment to others, MacIntyre seems to think.

Now, Muchnik understands Kant's and MacIntyre's theories as supplements: i.e., here's a moral psychology that helps explain how a certain social picture comes to be, and both together explain the emotivist predicament. Muchnik thinks that the Kantian account deepens and is compatible with MacIntyre's analysis. But here I have shown that is it incompatible: Muchnik wants to say "Kantian moral psychology explains the socio-historical circumstances of post-Enlightenment modernism," while MacIntyre has it the other way around: "The socio-historical circumstances of the post-enlightenment age explain the moral psychology of the emotivist." Thus, I suggest we read Kant's and MacIntyre's theories as competitors. If we do so, however, then, in my view, a theory that locates a problem in the structure of social institutions (MacIntyre) is preferable to a theory that requires various metaphysical commitments, including the dualism of a "dear self" seeking empirical happiness, on the one side, and a self that is conscious of her duty and intrinsic dignity, on the other side, where "duty" and "dignity" themselves are rooted in our "noumenal self" and the idea of a universal moral law (Kant). For MacIntyre, it is precisely Kant's conception of the self in terms of pure practical reason, i.e., independent of the empirical self and its contingent community values, that is part of the emotivist conundrum.²²² It is hard to see how Muchnik wants to reject this interpretation of Kant and cleanse Kant of the terminology of transcendental idealism, because his own narrative centers around the "dear self," who Muchnik understands as "a transcendental construct Kant assumes to explain how self-deception is possible," and he uses the analogy to "transcendental illusion" of the first *Critique* to elucidate the error underlying emotivism. It seems then that, after all, we cannot understand Kant's moral psychology underlying emotivism without also committing to at least some features of his transcendental idealism and his faculty talk. If this is so, then given all the overlap regarding the negative assessment of emotivism between Kant and MacIntyre, a theory without metaphysical

²²¹ Larmore, "Whose Justice?," 438.

²²² Cf. MacIntyre, *A Short History*, 197.

commitments is preferable. Thus, neither does Kant's theory deepen our understanding of the emotivist conundrum, nor does it help us to get out of it. MacIntyre and Kant remain strange bedfellows.

3. Conclusion

Towards the end of the paper, Muchnik writes:

To put things roughly: the fundamental moral threat in modern life, Kant realized, lies neither in violence nor in war (*à la* Hobbes), nor in the unfairness of the basic structure of society (*à la* Rawls), nor in the many ways we inflict cruelty on one another (*à la* Rorty); it lies, rather, in the fact that private vices contribute to public virtues (*à la* Mandeville).

I think this will be a tough sell to any contemporary reader, who is not already committed to Kant's philosophy. In my view, the way to address MacIntyre's position is by challenging his claim that modernism stands outside any tradition, everywhere and nowhere, as he says, and thus is lacking the "resources [to] understand the achievements and successes, and the failures and sterilities, of rival traditions."²²³ Modernism itself is a tradition, it does not stand outside all traditions. Discussing one of the liberal writers such as Rorty would make MacIntyre's observations less a manifesto and more a philosophical discourse. It is regrettable that neither MacIntyre nor Muchnik seriously discusses the resources of modern liberalism to address the seemingly endless contemporary moral and political controversies. In my view, MacIntyre is caught in an antiquated either-or mentality: either coherent overarching belief system that allows to rank order human goods or emotivism. Herein MacIntyre again resembles Kant: either desire for happiness or morality, either a maxim can be subsumed under the moral law or the dear self rules. Kant's entire moral philosophy is framed in terms of such dualisms: beginning with his pre-critical attempts to distinguish between prudence and morality, to his idea of the moral law that would be without effect unless God provides an incentive to act on it in the *Canon* chapter of the first *Critique* and the lectures of the 1770s (think of his alternative of either being a fool or knave), to Garve's review of the *Critique*, to Kant's response in the *Groundwork*

²²³ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 402.

distinguishing between heteronomy and autonomy.²²⁴ These alternatives strike me as unconvincing today. There are many examples of public discourse in liberal societies that lack a coherent conception of what constitutes the good life and yet successfully make progress (we assess what our opponents say in terms of our opponents all the time and then find a compromise, despite many counterexamples where such communication breaks down). I thought it helpful to sketch how MacIntyre thinks emotivism arises to show that it is not a good springboard for a philosophical discussion. From a Platonic/Kantian perspective, lack of systematicity and unity is a bad thing, and so fragmentation is too embarrassing “to be admitted to self-conscious awareness.”²²⁵ But from Rorty’s perspective, “tolerance of different rationalities,”²²⁶ fragmentation, and compartmentalization can be wholeheartedly embraced. Of course, there are bad forms of compartmentalization: e.g., “the brave soldier and good comrade who loves and is loved by his mates, but who thinks of women as dangerous, malevolent whores and bitches.”²²⁷ Or think of the educated Nazi who was a loving father, could cite Goethe and Kant, and ran concentration camps. Or think of those vaccination opponents citing the universal human right to one’s body while at the same time endorsing abortion bans. It is this type of compartmentalization—as it seems to be thriving in our contemporary moral and political debates—that Muchnik and MacIntyre use as their starting point. As I have argued, I am not sure that emotivism is to blame. Our conundrums might rather be the product of the play of naked power and intentional psychological manipulation—what I have called *cynicism*. And this sort of behavior, it seems to me, is neither rooted in the nature of humanity (Kant) nor is it the necessary consequence of the fragmentation of the liberal self (MacIntyre). It is so obvious that I don’t see what any philosophical theory could add. Finally, there are plenty of resources for liberal selves to deal with this crisis of modernity.²²⁸

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²²⁴ See Oliver Thorndike, *Kant’s Transition Project and Late Philosophy. Connecting the Opus postumum and Metaphysics of Morals* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 113–79.

²²⁵ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 397.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Rorty, “Human Rights,” 177.

²²⁸ I would like to thank Pablo Muchnik for writing a very thought-provoking paper. I am also indebted to an anonymous reviewer for a close reading of my comments and for providing helpful substantive philosophical and editorial recommendations. Finally, many thanks to Cindy Bond for her thorough copy edits.

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Reply to Thorndike

Pablo Muchnik, Emerson College

In his response to my paper, Oliver Thorndike raises two major concerns: (1) he finds problematic that I take MacIntyre's description of the contemporary moral situation at face value, and, (2) even if we were to concede that MacIntyre is right and there is an "emotivist conundrum," Thorndike doubts that "Kant is the right person to get us out of it."

The first concern stems from a misunderstanding about the nature of my project. It is not my intention to place side by side and compare the respective merits of MacIntyre's critique of contemporary moral selfhood and Rorty's liberal apologetics. Nor is it my intention to endorse MacIntyre's proposal to overcome emotivism, i.e., his historicist, traditionbound, narrative conception of the self. At no point do I engage, as Thorndike somehow expects me to, MacIntyre's "philosophical theory" as a whole—indeed, I expressly indicate that I would cast aside any such overarching aspirations. For, my goal is a lot more circumscribed: I am not trying to assess the fairness of MacIntyre's critique of liberalism, nor his success (or lack thereof) in reviving virtue ethics, nor his objections against universalist morality, nor the reasons for his dissatisfaction with the Enlightenment project. Others have done this before, and I have nothing to add here to these debates. What I set out to do, instead, is to use a Kantian lens to interpret the root causes of some of the social pathologies MacIntyre associates with an emotivist culture. Key symptoms of the problem are the interminable character of contemporary moral debate; the antagonistic and dogmatic stance we adopt to defend our assumptions; the anxiety and self-doubt that underly such a defense; the bad faith that accompanies much of public discourse; the hysteria that fuels many social media exchanges; the proliferation of fake news, alternative facts, and other convenient falsehoods; and the tribal and polarized tone of political exchange.

This does not mean that I am insensitive to the appeal of Rorty's liberal utopia, i.e., the promise of a literary culture that combines open-ended possibilities of self-creation and self-expression with a commitment to see cruelty as the *summum*

malum.²²⁹ Yet, attractive as this aestheticized view of an advanced liberal democracy might be, I find it useless when it comes to understanding the patently *dystopian* character of our *current* moral and political situation. I very much wish that what Thorndike calls “self-reflective emotivism,” modelled on Rorty’s *liberal ironist*, prevailed in contemporary society, so that agents with sufficient leisure, education, and money could spend their time discussing works of art among friends.²³⁰ But I am afraid that the “cynical emotivist,” the one who manipulates and deceives herself and others, is the dominant type in our culture. And this is something Thorndike himself acknowledges, as his comments on *The White Lotus*, election deniers, and current U.S. politics indicate.

The prevalence of this egregious type is not surprising, for when the “liberal” is severed from the “ironist,” the self-reflective emotivist becomes ineluctably “cynical.” The cynicism results from the fact that such an agent, as a good ironist, is conscious of the contingency of her beliefs and values, yet no longer thinks that pain and humiliation are the greatest vice—as a good (Rortyan) liberal should. We thus get all the contingency of final vocabularies, but none of the moral constraints that keep them in check. This, I believe, is the fundamental predicament advanced liberal societies are now facing, the crux of the “emotivist conundrum,” for we live in a time in which our idiosyncratic private commitments are freewheeling, detached from any public-minded concerns. MacIntyre’s scathing critique of the contemporary moral situation offers a rich vocabulary to name and interpret the symptoms of the decomposition of our democratic ethos, the most glaring exponent of which is Trump—a cynical emotivist *par excellence*. Compared to this clear-eyed perspective, Rorty’s infatuation with the Promised Land he calls “America” seems quaint and outmoded—a piece of naivete that exudes democratic pride and self-confidence, warranted perhaps in the 1990s but useless to traverse the long stretch of desert that lies ahead of us.

All this to say that Thorndike’s concern notwithstanding, I do not find the “springboard” of my project breaking. For even if Rorty (and Ai Wei Wei) were right and the emotivist self *also* contained exciting possibilities for human flourishing, those possibilities are peripheral in our moral and political landscape. I find nothing wrong

²²⁹ This is a view of liberalism that Rorty inherits from Judith Shklar. See Judith Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” in *Political Liberalism: Variations on a Theme*, ed. Shawn P. Young (SUNY Press, 2004, 149–66).

²³⁰ On “liberal irony,” see Richard Rorty’s *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

with endorsing MacIntyre's disgruntled views about emotivism as my starting point. For the liberal self is not on the scales in my essay—only its cynical embodiment is. Given the focus and circumscribed nature of my undertaking, the justification Thorndike expects from me would be a distraction. The fact that I take certain things for granted does not worry me: there is no thinking without presuppositions—what matters is our willingness to revise our assumptions when they lead us astray.

And the heuristic advantages of using MacIntyre as a springboard to tell the Kantian side of the emotivist story are considerable. For, seen with Kantian eyes, emotivism no longer appears as the logical/inevitable conclusion of the failure of the project of Enlightenment to justify morality. It appears, instead, as a particular instantiation of a general tendency in human reason to confuse subjective with objective grounds of judgment—a confusion that we then try to cover up with subreptitious modes of reasoning that help us preserve a good opinion of ourselves. No matter how difficult, Kant believes that such a tendency is ultimately corrigible, a corrigibility that opens a space for human freedom and takes much of the sting of MacIntyre's historical fatalism away. Putting things this way is important, for it allows us to realize, as I write at the end of my paper, that “the Enlightenment project has neither failed (as MacIntyre thought) nor has it been left behind (as some postmodernists and autocrats may think) but has barely begun.”

This is the lesson I claim MacIntyre misses because of the limitations of his historical/sociological method and narrow understanding of Kant. And this oversight, I believe, leads him to misdiagnose the causes of our social pathologies, which do not lie in liberalism as such, but in the deep-rooted propensity in human beings to deceive themselves, i.e., to hold to be *true* what they *want* to believe and to hold to be *good* what *pleases* them. This is the moral–psychological insight we can glean from Kant's discussion of error and radical evil. In my reading of Kant, liberal politics does not produce this tendency but does conceal it and make it more entrenched—hence the need of entering an ethical community and embracing rational religion.

With this latter claim, I take it, Kant parts ways with contemporary secularizing Kantians like Rawls or Habermas, who think that politics, all by itself, can be morally redeeming and see religion as a (potential) threat to the democratic dialogue. Moreover, to the extent that the (republican) political apparatus allows human beings to set their own ends and hence develop their own conception of the good, Kant also rejects the premodern nostalgia of thinkers like MacIntyre, who demands that “the

good” be held in common and thus impose an oppressive requirement for a pluralistic society like ours. Although Kant’s republicanism is not “liberal” in the proper sense of the word, it does contain the moral scaffolding necessary to ensure that irony does not turn into indecency. This is precisely the warrant that Rorty’s literary culture lacks, an insouciance which leaves liberal hope at the mercy of power mongers and makes of Kant’s philosophy a beacon of hope in dark times.

This characterization of complex political positions is clearly rash and provisional. But it might help us respond to Thorndike’s second concern, as it allows us to see that a “revival of Kant” might not be so untoward after all.

It is true, the Kant I present here is purged of many of the dualisms Thorndike seems to think belong to the “true Kant,” whom he fears is burdened with off-putting, Platonic-type distinctions: phenomena vs. noumena, morality vs. prudence, reason vs. passion, knowledge vs. opinion—to name just a few. Although my Kant is deliberately demure when it comes to metaphysical commitments, he is not altogether devoid (as Thorndike seems to think) of the conceptual apparatus that belongs to transcendental idealism—the “dear self,” a construct I propose to explain how self-deception itself is possible, is a case in point. But doing transcendental philosophy does not entail that one marries an atemporal, context-free, ahistorical conception of human rationality. For, as Kant himself admits in the 1787 Preface to the first *Critique*, reason itself has a history and comes of age after many a stumble and long struggle. Or, as he puts it in *Idea for a Universal History*: “Reason itself does not function according to instinct, but rather requires experimentation, practice and instruction in order to advance gradually from one stage of insight to the next” (I 8:19).²³¹ This gradual advance is a *collective* project, for Kant conceives of thinking as an eminently *social activity*, intimately tied with communicating one’s thoughts to others. For “how much and how correctly would we *think*, if we did not think, as it were, in community with others to whom we *communicate* our thoughts, and who communicate theirs to us!” (O 8:144). The Kantian subject, unlike Descartes’s solitary thinker, is a *cosmopolitan citizen* of the world, one who thinks along with others and requires a world to think.

The sociality of thought explains why self-deception is so troublesome for Kant, for the self-deceiver is trapped in an epistemic and axiological prison of her own

²³¹ Citations to Kant are from *Akademie Ausgabe* by volume and page. English quotations will be from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, general editors Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. I use the following abbreviations: “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim” (I) and “What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking” (O).

making, shielded from what others might say and indifferent to their needs. As the example of prejudices shows, this hermeneutic prison often includes like-minded subjects, whose agreement only works to hide our fears and sanction our biases—hence Kant’s relentless insistence on the importance of universality. As I see it, this insistence is not a sign of a futile attempt to transcend communities and traditions, not a flight into metaphysical purity. It is, rather, a token of a healthy distrust in parochial consensus, idiosyncratic interests, and oppressive group dynamics. I do not find here remnants of Platonism (as Thorndike does), but the wisdom of a philosopher who is fully aware of the darkness of the human heart and the perversion of our social bonds. So interpreted, there is nothing noumenally mysterious about the categorical imperative: when I submit my maxims to universal law, I say no more than “I will that you also will” —and try to extend that “you” as far as my imagination would let me.

In this reading, Kantian duty is an invitation to embrace a form of willing tailored to give pause to those cynical emotivists and self-deceivers who will whatever they please, and hence live in a world limited to themselves, their family, their class, their gender, their nation, their race. It is this kind of self-preferential attitude (of a “self” that can include like-minded others) that lies at the basis of our moral “conundrum.” If a bit of transcendental idealism is the price to diagnose and begin to treat the “disease,” I’ll be the first in line to pay it.

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Ido Geiger, *Kant and the Claims of the Empirical World. A Transcendental Reading of the Critique of the Power of Judgment*

Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp. xiv + 225, £75.00 (hardback). ISBN: 9781108992565.

Reviewed by Lorenzo Spagnesi, Universität Trier

Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (CPJ) is a puzzling work of philosophy. Although set to unify Kant's critical system, it is often described as a disunified patchwork of diverse topics. Geiger's new monograph is a remarkable attempt at providing a philosophically compelling interpretation of this work. It should be immediately noted that Geiger's book is one of the most significant publications on the CPJ in recent decades. It treats the philosophical material with exegetical rigor and masterful scholarship while defending an original, well-argued, and thought-provoking interpretation. In what follows, I briefly review this work and identify some challenges to it.

The main thesis defended in the book is that the assumption of purposiveness of nature is a transcendental condition of experience. I shall call this thesis "PTC." As Kant notoriously puts it in the Introductions to the CPJ, the transcendental conditions laid out in the *Critique of Pure Reason* are insufficient to determine an empirical order of nature. While this is an often-acknowledged point, few interpreters have analysed its far-ranging implications. Geiger proposes that PTC is (1) a unifying thought of CPJ and, as the completion of the critical project, it also (2) allows the transition from the theoretical to the practical realm of Kant's system. The book almost exclusively focuses on (1). Let me briefly remark that while Geiger concedes that the unity provided by his book is "partial" (p. 50), some further elaboration on the relation between (1) and (2) as well as on (2) would have helped readers better understand the scope and strength of the proposed account (some of this work can, however, be found in supporting papers of the author; see notes 2 and 3 of Introduction).

How does Geiger articulate PTC? In short, PTC has two key dimensions: a conceptual and an aesthetic one. The first four chapters of the book cover the conceptual dimension of PTC, whereas the fifth chapter discusses its aesthetic dimension. Both dimensions include necessary conditions of experience. This a strong claim even for "transcendental" readings of CPJ since it puts the latter at the very centre of the critical project—as dealing with the possibility of experience as such

rather than with specific experiences of beauty or teleology (as one may read, for example, Zuckert 2007's "transcendental" interpretation). Below I will take a closer look at the main line of argument (although there is much more to learn from other aspects of the book that I cannot discuss here).

In the first chapter, Geiger argues that the deduction of the principle of purposiveness in the Introductions is in fact only introductory. He fittingly points out two major flaws of Kant's notoriously brief deduction of the principle of purposiveness: (i) Kant does not explain why experience must take the form of a system of concepts; and, more importantly, (ii) he does not explain why a transcendental principle must be assumed. Before answering these questions, Geiger focuses on teleological judgments about organisms and argues that they are examples of the ultimate concern of CPJ, namely the purposiveness of nature as a whole. The approach results in an "instrumental" view of the teleology of organisms. While Geiger recognizes that Kant's analysis of teleology has important philosophical value (p. 64), it can at best "reveal rather than ground" PTC (p. 87) since it is based on the contingent fact that we judge some phenomena teleologically. In chapter 2, Geiger argues that although we must resort to intentional language when explaining organisms, the latter only concerns the description of the explananda and does not commit us to an ontological claim—all causal explanations being mechanical for Kant (a claim the author later clarifies; see below). The result of this approach is that the necessity of teleological judgments only attaches to some form of human language (thereby sidelining the role of a possible distinct kind of causality with respect to organisms). In chapter 3, Geiger expands his account of teleology to the Dialectic. He argues that there is no real conflict between the maxims of teleology and mechanism. The conflict only concerns the corresponding determinative claims, which are not principles of reflective judgment. The solution is elegant although it leaves somewhat unexplained why Kant emphasizes the antinomial nature of reflective judgement itself.

It is in the fourth chapter that Geiger provides a solution to (i) and (ii) above. First, that experience must take the form of systematicity is grounded in the discursivity of our understanding. Human understanding is such that it cognizes objects by subsuming particulars under universal concepts. Hence, ideally, empirical cognition takes the form of a complete system of concepts. Second, discursivity explains why conceptual PTC must be assumed. The reason is that only a complete system of concepts grounds claims to an objective order of nature. For Geiger, PTC

must therefore underlie any determinative judgments in their claims to objectivity. Finally, discursivity also explains what seems to be a mere assumption in Kant's philosophy, namely that all causal explanations are mechanistic, i.e. they must proceed from simpler parts (the higher concepts in a complete system) to complex wholes. These three claims combined have an important upshot, namely that empirical knowledge is in a strong sense fallible and revisable since it is grounded in PTC as a regulative assumption.

Let me briefly assess these claims. I think that the identification of discursivity as the cognitive ground of the conceptual PTC sheds much light on the argumentative structure of CPJ. However, I wish to challenge the justification of the claim that the assumption of conceptual PTC is Kant's commitment to objectivity. Geiger is aware of the problems of systematic considerations in grounding objectivity (since it is possible to think of laws that do not contribute to the simplicity or strength of a system) and rightly claims that the conceptual system that Kant is talking about is the one tracking genuine causal laws. But it should be noted that this claim falls short of a non-circular justification of objectivity—it simply stipulates that the conceptual system we assume is the objective one. Indeed, for Geiger, Kant posits an isomorphic relation between the parts and wholes of what is conceived and their concepts “as themselves parts and wholes” (p. 128). In other words, when we properly explicate the marks of a concept, we also explain a real whole in terms of its ‘parts’. While Kant may well subscribe to this or some version of this view, more analysis should be carried out. It is a question of its own, for example, whether and how causal parts of wholes correspond to conceptual marks (since causality and parthood are different relations). And one may doubt that simpler marks of a concept afford objective explanations of phenomena. After all, simplicity is a desideratum of our cognizing—not a warrant of objectivity.

Geiger's reply to the above challenge may be to qualify the claim to objectivity as a claim to a revisable and fallible kind of objectivity (see section 4.4.5). I think that this move, while legitimate, comes with a high price. For it entails that any determinative judgment is based on a regulative assumption that only guarantees its indeterminate revisability. In other words, conceptual PTC may jeopardize the claim to objectivity of even the most trivial determinative judgments. Note here a disanalogy between judgments about organisms and judgments about nature as a whole. While in the former case it is possible that the assumption of purposiveness is instrumental to finding mechanical laws, in the latter the assumption of PTC cannot be a mere tool to

finding objective explanations since, on Geiger's account, PTC is our very commitment to objectivity.

The second dimension of PTC, i.e. aesthetic purposiveness of nature, is presented in the last, rich chapter of the book. The main claim defended is that pure judgments of taste offer a first delineation of nature into objects, making possible a provisional parsing of nature. More specifically, Geiger interprets the harmony of the faculties expressed by aesthetic judgments as the "promissory feeling that a sensible manifold can be brought under concepts" (p. 168). This feeling, shared by all humans, corresponds to a non-conceptual grasp of nature that necessarily precedes cognition of nature. Such non-conceptual grasp targets spatial forms and identifies beautiful forms as those that are typical of natural kinds (thereby providing "empirical schemata" that may lead us to the discovery of conceptual systems). As a result, we aesthetically carve up nature into objects that are exemplary of natural kinds.

Some interpreters doubt that aesthetic judgment concerns cognition at all. For instance, Henrich (1992) assumes that the process through which objects are cognized by us cannot be the same process according to which objects are perceived aesthetically. Geiger questions this assumption and provides a strong case for how conceptual and non-conceptual resources jointly make empirical cognition possible. However, one may resist some of the claims defended by the author. A first challenge runs as follows. In the author's view, aesthetic PTC provides empirical schemata that allow us to apply concepts of systematicity to intuition (an element that the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason* could not provide; see section 5.3.3). But I think this is a perplexing claim for, even if we concede that spatial forms are prototypes of natural kinds, they still do not seem to correspond to concepts of systematicity (which, properly speaking, are "ideas of reason"). It is one thing to say that we identify a spatial form as the schema of "dog," and another to say that there is a systematic order of the genus "dog"—the latter claim seems to have no obvious spatial counterpart. Relatedly, I find it somewhat unsatisfactory that the schemata of PTC are spatial forms in their "promise," as it were, of natural kinds, rather than natural kinds themselves. It seems to me that purposiveness is an assumption concerning what kinds of things, beside their contingent features, really are in nature.

A possible response for Geiger might be (similarly to the reply above) to emphasize the revisability of cognition (i.e., to say that aesthetic PTC is only a first step in cognition), but it is unclear how aesthetic judgment positively contributes to

cognition. For suppose that aesthetic judgments afford a provisional parsing of objects. This does not seem a first step in cognition but a fallible and often misleading aspect of our epistemic access to the world. In other words, I am not sure what the epistemic value of sorting objects in this way would be. If we get cognition at all, it is precisely because we overcome first-hand parsing of things. Perhaps, however, one can still maintain that aesthetic PTC is a first step in cognition inasmuch as it “initiates” the process of cognizing, without itself contributing to it.

In the conclusion, Geiger recognizes that textual evidence may be insufficient to settle whether his interpretation of aesthetic PTC is exegetically correct. However, he thinks there are good philosophical reasons to hold it. In short, we can extract from Kant the thesis that pre-conceptual observations of similarity ground concept acquisition if they are part of an ongoing, rational investigation. For Geiger, this thesis offers a promising account of concept acquisition since (a) it avoids presupposing outright conceptualism about experience (the necessary aesthetic condition of experience being nonconceptual); and (b) it does not fall prey to the “Myth of the Given”, i.e. taking mere facts to be norms, because any factual deliverance of aesthetic judgment is subject to further investigation (p. 212). These last claims do much to clarify the normative dimension of PTC, i.e. that a complete and causally informative system of concepts is not something we will ever possess but rather a regulative demand of science. It is such a demand, not the mere fact that we form concepts, that makes the empirical world accessible for cognition. Although briefly developed in the conclusion, this Kantian account of concept acquisition has potential for various applications and may well deserve further exploration in the author’s future work.

Kant and the Claims of the Empirical World is set to become a classic in the literature on Kant and especially on CPJ. This is not to say that it will get everyone to agree—it defends novel and sometimes bold claims that will generate replies. But this is a quality to be expected of any highly original philosophical work (a quality that will itself spur investigation of Kant), especially one dealing with one of the most enigmatic works in the canon of Western philosophy.

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Larissa Berger. *Kants Philosophie des Schönen. Eine kommentarische Interpretation zu den §§ 1–22 der Kritik der Urteilskraft.*

Verlag Karl Alber, 2022, 1286 pp., €99, ISBN 978-3-495-49223-9.

Reviewed by Elena Romano, Freie Universität Berlin

In the face of numerous works and long-running discussions on Kant's aesthetics, Larissa Berger's impressive work on Kant's theory of the beautiful directly confronts the unsettling doubt that a genuinely novel contribution to Kant scholarship can still be made. By explicitly pointing out this often paralyzing and demotivating fear, Berger succeeds in showing its groundlessness. In many respects, Berger's work shows indeed that the richness of Kant's "Analytic of the Beautiful" is far from being exhausted. In this regard, Berger reveals the full potential of the first §§ 22 of the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment" by adopting the method of the interpretative commentary, to which is ultimately due the novelty of Berger's contribution to the most recent literature on Kant's aesthetics.

The method of interpretative commentary is meant to remedy the so-called phenomenon of the "oblivion of the text": to provide the reader with an exegetical, detailed, and contextualized analysis of texts and contribute to a better understanding of the theories they put forward (19).²³² *Kants Philosophie des Schönen* is Berger's successful application of this method to the four moments of the "Analytic of the Beautiful." Indeed, through this strict text-first methodology, the "Analytic of the Beautiful" is put under the most rigorous scrutiny, and Berger provides a solid background from which both original contributions to open debates and promising new problems can fruitfully arise. In this regard, despite the apparently merely exegetical approach of the commentary, Berger's work does not ignore the philosophical aim underlying the investigation on Kant's theory of the beautiful. To fulfill the purposes of both commentary and interpretative analysis, the book alternates reconstructive and interpretative sections; it includes clarifying excursuses on fundamental Kantian notions, discussions on transversal topics (*Grundlagen-Kapiteln*), and helpful overview sections on the main interpretative positions emerging from the secondary literature (*Literaturberichte*).

²³² Berger's reference is Gregor Damschen and Dieter Schönecker, *Selbst Philosophieren. Ein Methodenbuch*.

The reader will not find the extensive commentary the book provides at odds with its readability. In fact, the book is meant to serve different purposes and may not need to be read in its full length. As Berger explicitly declares, the work is rather intended to be consulted to clarify single portions of Kant's text or to cast light on specific theoretical discussions, such as those articulated by Berger in the *Grundlagen-Kapiteln* displayed throughout the text. In particular, the latter address relevant issues that are central to the author's interpretation of the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment" as a whole and may serve as a way to gain a more straightforward access to Berger's positions. It is precisely because the text was conceived not necessarily to be read as a whole that every section is designed to help the reader contextualize its parts within the author's more general interpretative framework. By keeping the aim of the commentary in mind, Berger succeeds in providing the reader with a helpful tool to accompany the reading of Kant's "Analytic of the Beautiful." Given the extensiveness of Berger's contribution, in what follows, I will just mention some of Berger's most insightful conclusions.

Inevitably relevant for Berger's whole interpretation of the "Analytic of the Beautiful" is her explanation of the disinterestedness thesis (*Uninteressiertheitsthesen*) in terms of Kant's assumption of the "felt fact of disinterested pleasure" (*Das gefühlte Faktum der uninteressierten Lust*, 156–160). Indeed, the disinterestedness thesis is taken by Berger as primarily a thesis on the distinctive phenomenal content of the pleasure in the beautiful, that is, on the "what it is like" of the aesthetic experience (*Grundlagen 1: Zum phänomenalen Gehalt der Lust am Schönen*, 180–204).²³³ This leads Berger to a further characterization of the pleasure in the beautiful as a complex feeling bearing the aspects of disinterestedness, freedom, and universality. In other words, the subject experiencing beauty feels no desire, no imposition, and feels herself to be transcending her merely private conditions. In addition to these aspects, Kant's definition of the pleasure in the beautiful as the *a priori* principle of the power of judgment implies that the subject feels in harmony both with nature and with herself.

Crucially, according to Berger, the disinterestedness thesis is not only a claim about the distinctive phenomenal content of judgments of taste, but also, together with the element of the "readiness for reflection" (*Bereitschaft zur Reflektion*, 677), an

²³³ For an account of pleasure as phenomenally indistinct, see Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*.

aspect of the aesthetic attitude (153–155, 676–678).²³⁴ On the one hand, with the disinterestedness thesis, Kant puts forward the requirement that the subject cannot feel any kind of interest toward the beautiful object for her to be able to experience beauty. On the other hand, Berger ascertains that the subject is supposed to be in a state of readiness for reflection. Since Kant grounds disinterested pleasure in the notorious free play of the faculties, in order for the latter to happen, the subject has to allow her imagination to apprehend forms and activate their examination through the *a priori* principle of the reflecting power of judgment (677). That can occur, for instance, if the subject draws enough attention to the object at stake and lets herself contemplate it for some time. As Berger meaningfully specifies, the aesthetic attitude is, however, effective only on the condition that the object is actually beautiful (678).²³⁵

Naturally, Berger’s articulation of the disinterestedness thesis both in terms of the distinctive phenomenal content of a judgment of taste and as a feature of the aesthetic attitude bears important consequences for the overall interpretation. As already noted above, Berger claims that the central theses of the “Analytic of the Beautiful” have a corresponding phenomenal manifestation. In fact, it is only the necessity of pleasure that does not have a phenomenal manifestation in the feeling of pleasure. It could not be otherwise: if the necessity were manifest in the feeling, then there would be an evident contradiction with the freedom that one is supposed to feel in aesthetic experience (191, 985–986). It is indeed one of the hallmarks of the pleasure in the beautiful that it is necessary but cannot be imposed. According to Berger, this is possible because our immediate consciousness of the necessity of pleasure is not felt but rather thought in the judgment (986, KU 5:237/121).²³⁶ The problem seems, however, to have deeper roots in the controversial understanding of the normative claim implied in Kantian judgments of taste (356). Clearly, the eventual contrast between the ought involved in judgments of taste and the freedom felt for the beautiful

²³⁴ On the difficulty in harmonizing the two aspects of Berger’s account of the disinterestedness thesis, namely its being both a claim on the phenomenal content and an element of the aesthetic attitude, see Zangwill, “Unkantian Notions of Disinterest.” For an account of the pleasure in the beautiful as requiring “more active engagement on the part of the subject,” see also Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology*.

²³⁵ Otherwise it might be possible to claim that everything can be beautiful, depending on whether the subject takes up the aesthetic attitude or not. Even though Berger does not discuss this specific issue, this specification and in particular her account of the beautiful object exclude this possibility (*Grundlagen 4: Das schöne Object*, 942–960). Cf. Breitenbach, “One Imagination in Experiences of Beauty and Achievements of Understanding”.

²³⁶ The quotations from the *Akademieausgabe (Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Volume 5) are followed by the number of the corresponding page from the Guyer and Matthews translation.

ultimately depends on the explanation of the prescriptive expressions Kant employs when elaborating on the universal and necessary validity of judgments of taste. In this regard, Berger's reading strongly relies on her account of the aesthetic attitude in order to accommodate the so-called aesthetic ought with the freedom thesis (*Freiheitsthese*). Since the latter excludes the reading of a judgment of taste in terms of a hidden imperative of the form "everyone ought to feel the pleasure" (356), Berger explains the prescriptiveness expressed by judgments of taste as exclusively referring to the aesthetic attitude. More precisely, Berger distinguishes both a descriptive and a prescriptive side of the claims of taste to universal and necessary validity. According to Berger, the definition of the beautiful as what pleases universally and necessarily without a concept is firstly to be read in a descriptive way. In this respect, the universal validity thesis (*Allgemeingültigkeitsthese*) implies that everyone always feel the pleasure in the beautiful with respect to a beautiful object under the condition that they assume the aesthetic attitude (350), and the necessity thesis (*Notwendigkeitsthese*) entails more strongly that it is impossible not to feel the pleasure in the beautiful and to claim accordingly that the object is not beautiful, if one assumes the right aesthetic attitude (967). Next to this descriptive explanation of the claims of taste, Berger acknowledges an additional prescriptive aspect of the universality and necessity theses, which is however directed in both cases to the aesthetic attitude. In other words, what a judgment of taste prescribes is to assume the aesthetic attitude to experience the beautiful object as such: everyone ought to be in the right position, that is, have the right attitude towards the object to feel the pleasure in the beautiful (349, 990).

Through the priority conferred to the descriptive reading of the universality and necessity of judgments of taste, Berger puts forward a strong interpretation of the claims of taste that would bring judgments of taste and cognitive judgments of experience very close to each other.²³⁷ Indeed, the similarity between the two kinds of judgments guides Berger's interpretation, as it emerges particularly clearly in her explanation of Kant's introduction of the *sensus communis* to justify the necessary universal validity of judgments of taste. In this regard, Berger develops a novel reading in particular based on the definition of common sense as the subjective principle of judgments of taste. Through a helpful reconstruction of Kant's notion of principle (1059–1060), Berger claims that with respect to judgments of taste, common sense

²³⁷ Cf. KU 5:191/77. For a "weaker" reading, see Fricke, *Kants Theorie des reinen Geschmacksurteils*.

works as a principle in a narrow sense, namely as serving as the major premise in a syllogism and having an *a priori* status (1097), just like *a priori* principles of the understanding with respect of judgments of experience. Indeed, judgments of experience legitimately claim necessary universal validity, as they are the result of the subsumption of a given intuition or of a judgment of perception under *a priori* principles of the understanding, to which the justification of the necessary universal validity of judgments of experience is due (1092–1095).

According to Berger, the same syllogistic model applies to judgments of taste. In this respect, a judgment of taste is the result of the subsumption of an actually felt pleasure, which takes the place of the minor premise in the syllogism, under the faculty of common sense, which works as the major premise. Ultimately, this explains how common sense genuinely serves as the justificatory ground of the claims of taste. Since common sense is defined as the effect of the free play of the faculties and the latter is taken by Berger to display the subjective condition of cognition, then the free play of the faculties assumes the role that the categories have with respect to the *a priori* principles of the understanding, namely, grounding the necessary universal validity of judgments of experience. Naturally, the differences between judgments of taste and cognitive judgments of experience are evident: namely, the premises of the syllogistic structure underlying judgments of taste are neither conceptual nor propositional. This explains why Berger refers to the syllogism at stake in Kant's articulation of judgments of taste as a *quasi-Syllogismus*, or a felt syllogism of taste (*Grundlagen 5: Der gefühlte Syllogismus des Geschmacks*, 1091–1110). Such a novel reading of the role of common sense in the justification of the claims of taste fits well not only with the explicit definition of common sense as the subjective principle of judgments of taste, but also with Kant's references to the subsumption structure throughout the "Analytic of the Beautiful."²³⁸ Moreover, it provides a novel problematization of the notion of exemplary necessity, whereby common sense takes the place of the principle from which judgments of taste derive, and hence explains the very possibility of a judgment being the example of a rule that cannot be produced (KU 5:237/121).

Berger's interpretation of the role and status of common sense within the "Analytic of the Beautiful" is strongly influenced by the similarity between judgments of taste and judgments of experience. In virtue of its status as a principle in a narrow Kantian sense, the notion of common sense is endowed by Berger with a

²³⁸ See, for instance, KU 5:237/121–122.

transcendental function similar to that of categories: it constitutes our aesthetic experience just as categories constitute objects of experience (1186). In this way, Berger takes a position with respect to the puzzling alternatives displayed by Kant at the end of the “Analytic of the Beautiful”: namely, whether common sense is a constitutive or a regulative principle, and hence whether taste is an innate faculty or “the idea of one that is yet to be acquired” (KU 5:240/124). Berger concludes her reading by submitting that common sense cannot but be a constitutive principle because it is what determines the pleasure in the beautiful.²³⁹ In drawing this conclusion, Berger is consistent with her overall interpretation, even though it may be at odds with the characterization of common sense as an idea (KU 5:238/122) and an ideal norm (KU 5:239/123), which would rather seem to call for the regulative model.²⁴⁰ However, Berger briefly explains the notion of common sense in terms of an innate disposition to feel the universal pleasure for the beautiful, rather than in terms of an already active aesthetic faculty (1186). Meaningfully, as a disposition, common sense would still need to be developed and cultivated. Thus, Berger’s account seems ultimately to be a compelling way to harmonize both of the alternatives displayed by Kant, and despite her being in favor of the constitutive one, her insightful conclusion may fruitfully open further reading paths.

Berger’s contribution to Kant scholarship is not limited to the topics that, for the sake of space, I was able to present in this review, namely the complex phenomenal content of the pleasure in the beautiful and the aesthetic attitude, the clarification of the nature of the universality and necessity claims, and the identification of a syllogistic structure underlying Kant’s crucial introduction of the notion of common sense. Those were just a hint at the richness emerging from Berger’s analysis, an analysis which makes *Kants Philosophie des Schönen* a book bound to stimulate new discussions and be a reference point for both students and advanced scholars.

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²³⁹ Cf. KU 5:197/82.

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