

KANT  
EIGHT PAPERS

D. R. Khashaba

2020

## FOREWORD

**In this volume I collect eight papers written over a period of two decades offering a fresh approach to a great thinker who was from the start misconstrued and whose crucial message continues to be ignored. I reproduce the papers with minimal revision. Where necessary I have added Notes to the relevant paper. Regrettably, I could not gather the numerous discussions of Kant scattered throughout my writings, but I just could not leave out “What Idealism Is Not” in which Kant looms large. By way of Preface I comment on excerpts from Kant’s Preface to the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*.**

**D. R. Khashaba**

**February 20, 2020**

**To**  
**Hubertus Fremerey**  
**whose constructive comments**  
**are always helpful**

## BY WAY OF PREFACE

**In the first part of the Preface to the first edition of the first *Critique* Kant plainly states the intent and scope of the work, but unfortunately he then goes on to vaunt the superstructure which hid and obscured the vital core. As a result, Kant's contemporaries failed to understand the book and ever since philosophers have ignored and learned scholars have mangled its crucial message. In the following lines I will survey Kant's preface, briefly commenting where I find it necessary. (All the excerpts are from Paul Guyer's**

and Allen W. Wood's translation in the Cambridge edition.)

The very first paragraph reveals that Kant's purpose was to discover the legitimate scope and power of reason, to show what was within and what was beyond the scope and power of human reason, clearly indicating the error of unbridled Rationalism which breeds dogmatic metaphysics.

“Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason.”

The second paragraph unfolds, amplifies, and emphasizes what is implied in the first. We read that reason can surmise that “it must somewhere be proceeding on the ground of hidden errors” that it cannot discover since the

**principles on which it proceeds “surpass the bounds of all experience”.**

**I pass by Kant’s lengthy historical survey of the downfall of metaphysics up to when it was thought that the endless metaphysical controversies could be put to an end “through a certain physiology of the human understanding (by the famous Locke)”. Kant then gets to where he says that**

**“our age ... will no longer be put off with illusory knowledge, and ...demands that reason should take on anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge, and to institute a court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims ..., and this not by mere decrees but according to its own eternal and unchangeable laws; and this court is none other than the critique of pure reason itself.”**

**In these lines we have the whole idea of Kant's system of transcendental criticism.**

**Next Kant tries to explain in some detail what he meant by a critique of pure reason but here trouble comes in, for, trying to present a highly original perspective in a condensed outline could not but be mystifying to his readers. He anticipates this and says:**

**“While I am saying this I believe I perceive in the face of the reader an indignation mixed with contempt at claims that are apparently so pretentious and immodest ...”**

**His claims, he insists,**

**“are incomparably more moderate than those of any author ... who pretends to prove the simple nature of the soul or the necessity of a first beginning of the world”, for that would be “to extend human cognition beyond all bounds of possible experience”.**

**At this point we are faced with something ominous: Kant says that**

**“common logic already also gives me an example of how the simple acts of reason may be fully and systematically enumerated” and goes on to speak of “the completeness in reaching each of the ends, and for the comprehensiveness in reaching all of them ...”**

**— systematic enumeration, completeness, comprehensiveness, such is the lure that tempted Kant to erect his daunting architectonic of deductions, analyses, categories, whose only consequence was to dismay genuine philosophers and offer a rich banquet for the learned to practise their endless juggleries. The rich core of Kant’s *Critique* was buried under heaps of extraneous padding.**

**What Kant refers to as “apodictic (philosophical) certainty” is, I presume, the area of Kant’s**

**greatest and most original logical innovation, the synthetic *a priori* statements (propositions). These are creative imaginative intelligible formations whose ‘certainty’ is nothing but their intrinsic coherence; they have no other certainty. Such are all moral maxims. As such all arithmetic would be seen to be if it had not proved so pragmatically useful that we find it difficult to believe that its ‘truth’ and its ‘certainty’ is a fiction of our own creation. When it comes to moral maxims it is only by special concession that we may call them true: they are not true but real as endowing us with visions in which we enjoy our spiritual life, have our transcendent reality as moral agents, persons, souls.**

**Kant goes on to explain and to defend the convoluted structure of the *Critique*, thereby only wronging himself and hiding his vital insight and true message under accidental outgrowths.**

**There is much in Kant's Preface that I refrain to comment on lest I be imitating Kant in obfuscating and confusing what I want to clarify.**

**D. R. Khashaba**

## CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>By way of Preface</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Kant and Plato (from <i>The Sphinx and the Phoenix</i>)</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Kant, <i>Critique of Practical Reason</i> (Part II of “Free Will as Creativity”)</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Kant (from <i>Quest of Reality</i>)</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Reasoning in Kant’s Ethical Works (from <i>Plato’s Universe of Discourse</i>)</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>Kant on Metaphysics (from <i>Plato’s Universe of Discourse</i>)</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>Kant’s Message (from <i>Goodbye to Philosophy</i>)</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>Kant and the Enlightenment Promise</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>ANNEX</b>	
<b>What Idealism Is Not (from <i>Last Words</i>)</b>	<b>221</b>

# KANT AND PLATO

[From *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009]

*[Roman numbers in square brackets [] refer to Endnotes, Arabic numbers preceded by \* refer to Additional Notes]*

## PREFATORY

I have often before represented Kant's position as a re-discovery or re-affirmation of an insight that we owe in the first place to Socrates, preserved for us in the works of Plato, though Kant

**failed to regain the full fruition of the Socratic-Platonic insight. That insight, not only as fully developed by Plato, but even in the partial recovery achieved by Kant, has remained lost to us.**

**Hume, taking to its logical conclusion Locke's empiricism, in which the mind was a void receptacle, had shown that, if we took Locke's assumptions more consistently than Locke himself did, we could have no secure knowledge. All judgment would be either tautologous or strictly contingent. Kant, in seeking to rescue the possibility of scientific knowledge, found that we have to acknowledge the active participation of the mind in knowledge, that what he termed synthetic *a priori* judgments rest on forms, concepts, and principles that have no source other than the mind. In so doing, Kant moved in the direction of the Socratic-Platonic**

**conception of the mind as the ground and source of all knowledge and all understanding.**

**When I tried to follow in detail the points where the *Critique of Pure Reason* met with Plato's position, I found that I had to highlight the differences more than the points of agreement. Possibly I had earlier read more of Plato into Kant than Kant would have acknowledged. In this paper I mean to suggest that, while there is a considerable measure of convergence in the positions of two of the acutest minds that ever engaged in philosophical thinking, yet Plato opens up for us vistas of thought that Kant did not envisage.**

**Kant formulates the 'general problem (*Aufgabe*) of pure reason' thus: How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible? I think that the answer given to the question in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the answer that may be garnered**

from Plato's dialogues constitute two distinct universes of discourse that nevertheless reflect the same insight — and as a Platonist I may be permitted to say that the insight in Plato is deeper and less encumbered with non-essential adjuncts: for Kant had Aristotle's fondness for technicalities, firm definitions, and complex theoretical structures; 'architectonic' was a term dear to Kant's heart.

*All quotations below from the Critique of Pure Reason are from the translation by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. [i] Figures preceded by the letter A and/or B refer to page numbers in the first and/or second editions, followed by page number in Guyer's and Wood's translation. Quotations from the Critique of Judgment are from the translation by Werner S. Pluhar [ii] and give the Akademie edition page number followed by the page number in Pluhar's translation.*

## **AN OUTLINE OF SOCRATES' POSITION**

**Whatever may be due to Plato of the philosophy we find in the dialogues, I think we can with confidence attribute to Socrates (1) the distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible; and (2) the radical separation of knowledge relating to the natural world from the understanding that the philosopher seeks. Socrates was primarily concerned with moral ideas and values. In his tireless examination of his fellow-citizens, which was at the same time, as he insisted, an examination of his own mind and soul, he sought to clarify those ideas and values, illuminate them, disentangle them, and free them from foreign accretions. This is what Aristotle misrepresented as a search for definitions. In Socrates' elenctic dis-**

**courses all proposed definitions are rejected as unsatisfactory. The negative outcome with the resulting *aporia* was not accidental. It was not the purpose of Socrates to reach a formal or a working definition but to free his interlocutors' minds of confused notions and presuppositions and help them towards a better understanding of themselves. [iii] Later in life Plato may have experimented with methods of classification, of collection and division, as he experimented with hypothetical reasoning, to reach working definitions and sustainable propositions. That was not a substitute for the Socratic elenctic; it was a diversion in response to the branching interests of the Academy.**

**Socrates knew that the moral ideas in virtue of which alone we are human, which alone give meaning and value to human life, have no source other than the mind\*1). They constitute an intelligible realm fully independent of the perceptible**

**world. The instances of justice, reasonableness, courage, that we find in the outside world are only seen as such, adjudged as such, in the light of the ideas. Socrates may have remained solely concerned with moral ideas, but Plato saw that not only are the moral concepts together with the notions of mathematical equality and number purely intelligible but that all things of the perceptible world only have meaning for us in virtue of the intelligible forms engendered in the mind. Perhaps this is what Plato meant to point out when he made Parmenides, in the dialogue named after him, tell young Socrates that when philosophy has taken hold of him he will not think hair or mud or dirt unworthy of being illuminated by intelligible forms. [iv]**

**In the *Phaedo* Plato makes Socrates give an autobiographical account, [v] the main lesson of which has not yet, I believe, been appropriated by students of philosophy. Socrates says that ear-**

ly in life he renounced inquiry into physical causes when he realized that the study of the outside world does not yield answers to the questions that concerned him. He draws a clear line between the kind of knowledge that can be obtained from a study of the outer world and the understanding [vi] that can only come from reflection by the mind on the ideas proper to the mind. The first, we may say, is the region of science and gives knowledge of the phenomenal world, and the second the region of philosophy and gives insight into the ideals and values by virtue of which humans are human. The scientist's description of Socrates' bones and sinews and neurons tells us how he sits crouched on his prison bed but only Socrates' ideal of obedience to the law makes us understand why he chooses to remain in prison awaiting execution rather than seeking safety elsewhere. This is a corollary of the distinction between the intelligible realm

**and the perceptible realm. The questions raised by physical investigation are distinct from those raised by philosophical inquiry, and the answers reached in the one area irrelevant to the other.**

**[vii] Kant also saw this and the whole of his critical system affirmed it and yet philosophers, scientists, and theologians have equally failed to heed the lesson.**

## **AN OUTLINE OF PLATO'S POSITION ON KNOWLEDGE AND REALITY**

**The Socratic radical distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible realms remained the basis of Plato's philosophical outlook. [viii] For Plato, the intelligible realm was the realm of reality. He equated *ousia*, *to on*, *alêtheia* with the intelligible. The perceptible world, the whole of the natural world with its phenomenal manifestations, ceaselessly changing and shot through**

**and through with relativity, could not be but a world of shadows. This is the message of the famous Allegory of the Cave (*Republic* 514ff.) . In the *Phaedo* we are told that when we try to acquire knowledge through the bodily senses, the mind is dragged by the body into the realm of the changeable, and loses its way and becomes confused, but when it investigates by itself, it passes into the realm of what is pure. [ix]**

**In the *Republic* Plato gives an account of the philosophic ascent from the mutability and relativity of the perceptible world to the contemplation of what is real in the realm of pure ideas. Then he represents the levels of knowledge possible to human beings in the graphic image of the Divided Line. Briefly, we have different levels of knowledge on two planes, that of the real and intelligible on the one hand, and that of the phenomenal, less real and less knowable, on the other hand. The divisions of the line representing**

these two levels are further each divided into two sections. In the lower section of the lower division we have images or illusions, and in the higher section we can have perceptions and opinions. On the intelligible plane, employing forms, we can have scientific knowledge of perceptible things on the lower level, and we can have a purer form of knowledge concerned with first principles on the higher level.

But for Plato that highest knowledge concerned with first principles, which is philosophy proper, cannot aspire to the possession of absolute or final truth. The intelligible realm is the realm of reality and we learn in the *Republic* that the apex and crown of that realm is the Form of the Good. That is the highest reality that philosophical thinking can lead to. But Socrates in the *Republic* cannot give an account of the Form of the Good. He can only give a simile. The Good is to mind and the intelligible as the sun is to sight

**and the visible. It is the cause of knowledge and truth but is beyond the reach of knowledge and truth. Thus just as the only outcome of the Socratic elenctic examination is to lead us to look within our mind, so for Plato all search for reality leads us back – not to mind as an abstract concept – but to the activity of the mind, the exercise of intelligence, as the only reality we know. Yet all representation of philosophical insight in determinate conceptual formulations must necessarily be imperfect. If we rest content with it, if we accept it as final, it turns into falsehood. Thus in the *Phaedrus*[x] and in the Seventh Letter[xi] we are told in the plainest terms that the profoundest insights cannot be expressed in a fixed formula of words. Therefore all philosophical formulations must be subjected to dialectical criticism which exposes and destroys their conceptual presuppositions. [xii] This is the only way for the mind to remain alive.**

## **AN ABSTRACT OF KANT'S CRITICAL SYSTEM**

**In this essay I will not examine the argument of Kant's *Critique* or subject his highly intricate analyses and deductions to criticism: all of these are accidental accretions to what is essential in Kant. I will not be so heartless as to echo Nietzsche's lambasting of the "tartuffery, as stiff as it is virtuous, of old Kant as he lures us along the dialectical bypaths which lead, more correctly, mislead, to his 'categorical imperative' ..." [xiii], but I will say that Kant's laborious analyses and rigorous deductions do more to obscure his essential insights than to clarify them. Every philosopher arrives at (or adopts from another) his 'conclusions' first and then works out arguments to support them. No philosopher worth his salt**

**has ever reached his most important positions by reasoning from neutral premisses.**

**The legend of Kant's overnight awakening from his dogmatic slumber thanks to Hume, which was initiated by Kant himself in the Introduction to *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, can be misleading. It is important to be clear about what Kant meant in speaking of his 'dogmatic slumber'. Kant had his early schooling in philosophy at the hands of the Rationalists. He was influenced by Leibniz and Wolff who, in common with Descartes, believed that the world could be known *a priori* through analysis of ideas and logical deduction. It is this reliance on pure ideas for yielding knowledge of the outside world that Kant came, under the shock of Humean scepticism, to reject and to dub 'dogmatic'. But he did not forgo his conviction concerning the active role of the mind. In place of Descartes's innate ideas, he introduced tran-**

**scendental forms, transcendental categories, and Ideas of pure reason. His inaugural dissertation was entitled “On the Form and Principles of the Perceptible and Intelligible World”. That was in 1770, eleven years before publication of the first *Critique* in 1781. No doubt the insight that “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” [xiv] \*2) was then nascent in his mind even if not explicitly formulated yet.**

**Locke and Hume discounted the activity of the mind in their accounts of human understanding. Even Berkeley, for whom phenomenal things could only be for a mind, did not lay stress on the activity of the human mind and had to seek security for the being of the phenomenal in the mind of God. Kant had to remind us that without the activity of the human mind there can be no science, no knowledge, no understanding. Thus the first step towards achieving the double-**

goal of, on the one hand, getting rid of dogmatism, and, on the other hand, escaping Humean scepticism, was to reject Locke's *tabula rasa* which Hume had accepted without question. Hence Kant sets off on erecting the magnificent edifice of his critical system by proposing that human cognition has two sources, sensibility and the understanding: through sensibility we are presented with objects, but it is through the understanding that we think these objects. [xv] He finds that time and space, which Newton regarded as objective entities containing things, are forms contributed by the mind, and asserts that even sensible perception is only possible through synthesis under the categories of the understanding, so that "the categories are conditions of the possibility of experience, and are thus also valid *a priori* of all objects of experience." [xvi] The human mind is active and contributes to knowledge at all levels, from simple perception

**to the highest levels of theoretical thinking. In the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique* Kant says that whoever first demonstrated a geometrical proposition found that “in order to know something securely *a priori* he had to ascribe to the thing nothing except what followed necessarily from what he himself had put into it in accordance with its concept.” [xvii] The revolution brought about in the study of nature was due to “the inspiration that what reason ... has to learn from nature, it has to seek in the latter ... in accordance with what reason itself puts into nature.” [xviii]**

**In the first edition of the *Critique* Kant underlined in bold terms the role of the mind in actively forming our knowledge of the natural world: It is our own mind that confers on appearances the order and regularity through which the chaotic presentations of our experience are turned into what we call nature. [xix]**

**Thus the understanding, strictly speaking, legislates for nature, so that “without understanding there would not be any nature at all ..”\*3) [xx] In so far as human experience is concerned “the understanding is itself the source of the laws of nature.” [xxi] Kant found it necessary to re-write this whole section in the second edition. It was so shocking for both the rationalist and the empiricist frames of mind.**

**The empiricist position maintains that true statements are of two kinds only. They are either (a) empirical statements verifiable by observation and experiment or (b) analytical statements. Apart from these there are no true statements. To save mathematical propositions which were too important, practically, to be dumped, empiricists considered them to be analytical. Kant reclassified statements into three kinds. He went along with the empiricists in admitting analytical statements (which are only useful for clarifica-**

tion but do not add to our knowledge) and empirically verifiable statements which Kant termed synthetic *a posteriori* statements. In addition to these he maintained that there are synthetic *a priori* statements. He found the prime example of such statements in mathematical propositions, which the empiricists had considered as analytical. Kant, agreeing with Plato (whether consciously or unconsciously) said that  $5 + 7 = 12$  is not analytical but synthetic. \*4) This led him to raise the question how such synthetic *a priori* statements are possible. The answer he found was that the mind contributes forms, concepts, and principles that join distinct elements synthetically. Not only does the mind join 5 and 7 in the original form 12; the mind also joins an antecedent and a subsequent event – which Hume saw as succeeding each other without any necessary connection – under the form of causality, which decrees that the cause must be fol-

**lowed by its effect and that the effect must have had a cause.**

**This was the substance of what Kant announced as his ‘Copernican revolution’. While earlier it had been assumed by thinkers that “all our cognition must conform to objects”, he suggested that we “try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition.” [xxii] But this is nothing but the Platonic principle that all knowledge – including empirical knowledge down to simple sensible perception – rests on ideas born in the mind. Here we have the same insight: that all things are only intelligible in virtue of the forms engendered in and by the mind; that concepts of relationship, identity, causation, etc., are not found in the natural world; they are contributed by the mind.**

**The first foundation of Kant’s epistemology, then, is the distinction between the sensibility and the understanding. The sensibility receives its content from the natural world, but this content only yields knowledge when subjected to the forms of the understanding, which forms do not come from the outside world but are provided by the mind. But the knowledge we thus obtain of the world is knowledge of the world as it appears to us under the garb supplied by our own mind. The concepts of the understanding, for all their vital importance, can only give us knowledge of objects in space and time, which are themselves not objective but are modes of our sensibility or, in Kant’s terminology, forms of intuition. It follows that “everything that the understanding draws out of itself, without borrowing it from experience, it nevertheless has solely for the sake of use in experience.” [xxiii] The understanding with its concepts and categories must be kept**

**apart from the pure transcendental ideas of reason. We err when we try to apply the concepts and categories of the understanding – time, space, causality – to the final ground of things or the ultimate origin of things, which are beyond the range of all possible experience.**

**We need not at this point busy ourselves with the Kantian distinction between phenomena and noumena. What is of consequence, under these conditions, is that all we can know *a priori* (= independently of experience = by pure reason) \*5) is of the world as it may present itself to us under the forms of the understanding. This is the limit of our knowledge of the natural world: we know the immediate presentations of our experience and we can make judgment of possible presentations of our experience. Thus Kant heads section 22 of the second-edition version of the ‘transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding’ with the rubric: “The category has**

**no other use for the cognition of things than its application to objects of experience” [xxiv] and opens the following section with the words: “The above proposition is of the greatest importance, for it determines the boundaries of the use of the pure concepts of the understanding in regard to objects.” [xxv]**

**In the Transcendental Dialectic [xxvi] Kant sets out to clear away the illusions of dogmatic metaphysics and theology. Thus in the extensive and laboriously argued Antinomy of Pure Reason Kant shows that, taking the concepts of the understanding (the mathematical notions and the principle of causality) – which serve us so well in dealing with the phenomena of nature – and employing them as abstract concepts without experiential content, we can build up logically valid inferential sequences yielding mutually contradictory propositions. He thus shows that the traditionally conflicting theological and met-**

**aphysical positions relating to the fundamental nature and ultimate cause of things that had been hotly debated for millennia could all be plausibly proved and disproved at the same time. What we must conclude from this is that these theological and metaphysical questions can neither be settled by the methods of empirical science, being beyond the scope of experience, nor by the procedures of pure reason.**

**As opposed to the concepts of the understanding, the concepts of reason, which Kant calls transcendental ideas, are concepts “to which no congruent object can be given in the senses.” [xxvii] While the concepts of the understanding bring about the synthetic unity of representations, the transcendental ideas of pure reason produce “the unconditioned synthetic unity of all conditions in general.” [xxviii] Kant brings all transcendental ideas under three classes: (a) the absolute (unconditioned) unity of the**

thinking subject, (b) the absolute unity of the series of conditions of appearances, (c) the absolute unity of the condition of all objects of thought in general. [xxix] These translate into: (a) the idea of the self, (b) the idea of the world, and (c) the idea of the ultimate ground and origin of all being, or, using Platonic terms, into: (a) *psuchê*, (b) *phusis*, (c) *to on*. These transcendental ideas, according to Kant, have no application in experience and are thus of no theoretical utility. On the plane of theoretical thought, our only gain in being aware of them would be the negative (yet very important) one of avoiding the error of drawing from them judgments relating to the phenomenal world. However, Kant found employment for them in the postulates of practical reason: of this I will have more to say in what follows.

The end-result of all of Kant's Herculean endeavours – and his system is truly an edifice that

**only a Hercules of Thought could have erected – was to re-state in more complex terms what Plato had already said: All that we know of the objective world, of the world of nature, we only know by means of and in the light of ideas engendered in and by the mind; that the mind-generated ideas that transform for us the world of shadows into an intelligible realm relate only to that actual world of shadows. Kant takes us on an exhilarating journey through the realms of the mind, but in the end, to me at any rate, adds nothing to what I find in Plato’s *Republic* – and I find Plato’s account simpler, profounder, more inspiring, and less open to contradiction.**

**Kant expected his *Critique of Pure Reason* to bring about a complete change of thinking. His expectation was not unreasonable, and yet, even now, more than two hundred years after publication of the *Critique*, it is far from fulfilled. Despite the massive scholarly work done on Kant’s**

**philosophy, philosophers are in as deep a ‘dogmatic slumber’ as before Kant completed the structure for which Hume had levelled the ground. The lesson has not been learnt: theologians and scientists on different sides and in opposite directions glibly and in all confidence believe themselves able to determine what is beyond experience by the use of pure reason. Not only do we find theologians arguing about God and immortality but we also find scientists seriously seeking to discover the ultimate origin of the world, an origin which, if in time, can never be the origin but must always have something preceding it as its ground and origin, and if outside time, cannot be subject to empirical criteria and empirical methodology and consequently does not lie within the scope of objective knowledge. They fail to see that all of human knowledge is comprehended exhaustively in two spheres: on the one hand we have factual information about**

**phenomenal presentations and on the other hand we have awareness of the living, creative, inner reality of the mind. The one sphere is that of science which teaches us the what and the how but never the why of things, and the other sphere is that of poetry and art and philosophy in which our spiritual essence affirms its reality in living its own creativity.**

**Kant hoped to make of metaphysics a ‘secure science’, and thought he did indeed. That was the error that obscured his great insight — the insight that should have put philosophy on the true path. Science and theology together had conspired to bury the Socratic insight under heaps of brilliant knowledge and mountains of dazzling theoretical speculation. That went on for some twenty-two centuries. Then came Kant and after much knocking about he saw what Socrates had seen. But he constructed around the vital insight a massive edifice of analyses and**

**deductions and architectonics, and scholars busied themselves studying the majestic surrounding structure – Kant’s cherished science –, admiring it or finding fault with its details, and both admirers and fault-finders lost sight of the treasure that lay hid within.**

## **CRITICISM OF CERTAIN ASPECTS OF KANT’S CRITICAL SYSTEM**

**Kant seeks to deduce the *a priori* grounds for the possibility of experience. If we do not start from the self-evidence of intelligent experience as the ground of all understanding and all knowledge, we keep vainly going round and round in our epistemological and psychological theorizing. But if we start from the activity of the mind as a self-evident reality, then no argument and no proof are needed. By arguing for this, by advancing proofs for this, Kant was turning the mind**

**into an objective, observable, analyzable object, and was thus equally with the empiricists, opening the door for reductionists to throw the reality of the mind behind their backs. To my mind, the totality of our experience is what we know. The immediacy of intelligible living experience is the starting point, the springboard, for all thought.**

**After representing space and time as forms of intuition, Kant goes on, in the *Analytic of Concepts*, to argue that there are *a priori* categories that we apply to the natural world. Kant ‘deduces’ the complete set of these categories, arranging them in four groups, each containing three categories, making a total of twelve fixed categories. [xxx] Kant created for himself and for others unnecessary difficulties by limiting the contribution of the mind to fixed forms of intuition and fixed categories. Despite his sophisticated deductions and proofs, there is no necessity and no finality attaching to Kant’s Categories any**

**more than to Aristotle's, which Kant criticizes. Both thinkers overlooked that their sets of categories were merely a convenient classification of the kinds of concepts, as good as but no better than the grammatical classification of the 'parts of speech'. That Kant's categories were metaphysical while Aristotle's were logical is beside the point. Both great thinkers were seduced by their fondness for the neat and finished.**

**All of Kant's transcendental arguments, all of his elaborate analyses and deductions, can be replaced by a descriptive account of a world-view and a special universe of discourse that can exist side by side with other world-views and universes of discourse. Witness how radically distinct cultures embody concepts that are strictly untranslatable into each other. Even languages which are not widely different from each other contain concepts which cannot be translated into each other without some distortion. Eve-**

**ry language is a special universe of discourse through which speakers of that language live out their special life as human beings.**

**In his ‘refutation of material idealism’, Kant offers to prove the existence of objects in space outside us. The proof runs as follows: I am conscious of my existence as determined in time, which presupposes something persistent in perception; but this cannot be something in me, since my own existence in time can only be determined through this persistent thing. “Consequently, the determination of my existence in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself.” [xxxii] As a proof this is dubious; it is much better to present this as a creative idea. What I am aware of, what a new-born baby is aware of, what a pup is aware of, is the experiential continuum. By dividing this continuum into self and other than self, I become a person surrounded by**

**an external world; the baby becomes a person surrounded by an external world; the pup may perhaps never achieve that separation and thus may conceivably remain an undistinguished part of the continuum.**

**Kant says that inner sense “by means of which the mind intuits itself, or its inner state, gives ... no intuition of the soul itself, as an object.” [xxxii] No wonder Kant finds a difficulty in the question “how a subject can internally intuit itself”. This is a difficulty in which Kant needlessly entangles himself. He speaks of the consciousness of the self in the representation ‘I’ and asserts that it is no intuition but only an intellectual representation of “the self-activity of a thinking subject.” [xxxiii] Since he chooses to speak of ‘the representation I’, then naturally to call that an intuition would be a contradiction in terms. But by refusing to break through the merely intellectual representation to the reality**

**of the “self-activity of a thinking subject”, he renders himself powerless to extricate himself from the difficulty. He finds that inner sense “presents even ourselves to consciousness only as we appear to ourselves, not as we are in ourselves, since we intuit ourselves only as we are internally affected, which seems to be contradictory, since we would have to relate to ourselves passively”. [xxxiv] What a maze of confusion! What a Gordian knot! But the knot can be broken at one blow by simply saying that our inner sense is ourselves. Kant continues the lines I quoted above to say that the difficulty he indicated is the reason why systems of psychology treat inner sense as the same as the faculty of apperception\*6) which, he reminds us, he carefully distinguishes. He does not see that it is by making too much of this distinction between apperception and inner sense that he creates difficulties for his system. On the one hand inner sense**

presents ourselves to ourselves “as we appear to ourselves, not as we are in ourselves”, and on the other hand apperception, to which Kant seemingly assigns a crucial position in his system, becomes a mere conceptual construct.

The transcendental unity of apperception, had not Kant thus rendered it sapless and lifeless, would be the most important notion, the most fundamental principle in Kant’s philosophy, being the final condition of the possibility of experience. But this is not something to be deduced or proved. It is Kant’s attempt to deduce or to prove this that lays his system open to criticism and obscures the great insight at the heart of his philosophy. The transcendental unity of apperception – that frightful mouthful – is simply the reality of the mind, is the *nous*, the *phronêsis*, which, for Plato, is the primal self-evident reality, the reality from which all knowledge springs, in which all awareness is

**grounded. Unless we start from the reality of the mind, of the transcendental unity of apperception, we cannot escape Hume's destruction of rational knowledge, and cannot find any meaning in the world.**

**Our philosophers of mind and philosophizing neuroscientists, accepting with Kant that what he calls apperception cannot be an object, and, with him, failing to see that it is precisely because it is our inner reality that it cannot be objectified, end by turning it into a negligible epiphenomenon, a species of mental gossamer. This inner sense by which the mind 'intuits itself', is the only reality known to us immediately, transcending all the transient phenomenal givennesses, and it can never be given as an object, since subjectivity is its essence. This is the reality that empiricists and reductionists deny us; it is the reality that baffles all their efforts to represent the mind as something observable and measurable.**

**This is the reality in which Socrates and Plato saw our distinctive character and our whole worth as human beings.**

**There are those who tell us that it is our neurons that determine our thinking, our behaviour, our will. With the advancement of research we will no doubt continue to find more and more concomitant incidences of brain states on the one hand and expressed thought and performed action on the other hand. But, I venture to assert, we will never understand how brain states produce thought and action. Well, nevertheless, let us say that I am my brain; I will not here make a bone of contention even of that. It is enough for me if we find that the act of thinking is what is real. But thinking is not a concatenation of Humean ideas. Thinking is an integrated, autonomous activity. And it is in that activity that I find my reality, and it is the inwardness of that activity that I call my mind, my self, my *psuchê*.**

**Thus, granted that I am my brain; still, my brain is a relatively autonomous organism, [xxxv] and it is the inwardness of that autonomous organism that is my reality, my mind, my soul.\*7) And that inwardness is what I call subjectivity. The intelligent mind is not aware of its reality; its reality is its awareness.**

**In the “Remark on the Third Antinomy” Kant says that though the thesis affirming that “the faculty of beginning a series in time entirely on its own (*von selbst*)” is proved, yet “no insight into it is achieved.” [xxxvi] To my mind this reveals a serious and seriously damaging fault in conventional philosophic thinking — that it needlessly limits its purview to conceptual thought. Otherwise I don’t see how any intelligent person can say that we have no insight into spontaneous origination when every sentence we utter, let alone every poem or song or tale, is an instance of creativity, is an instance of a directly**

**experienced act of creation. — Kant, in whose system the term ‘intuition’ (*Anschauung*) features prominently, narrows and depletes the notion and removes it from the richest and profoundest areas of our experience.**

**Similarly, when Kant says that “reason creates the idea of a spontaneity, which could start to act from itself, without needing to be preceded by any other cause that in turn determines it to action according to the law of causal connection”, [xxxvii] I would say rather that reason does not create for itself the idea of spontaneity as it creates for itself the idea of causality. It knows the reality of spontaneity in the immediacy of awareness. Causality is a working fiction; spontaneity is a lived reality, an aspect of our inner reality.**

**“The final aim”, Kant says, “to which in the end the speculation of reason in its transcendental use is directed concerns three objects: the**

freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God.” [xxxviii] Pure philosophy, Kant says, is concerned with these three problems. These in turn boil down to the question of “what is to be done if the will is free, if there is a God, and if there is a future world.” [xxxix] Kant not only narrows the scope of ‘pure philosophy’ unnecessarily, but, more seriously, harms the autonomy and degrades the worth of the moral life. Philosophy is not concerned with ‘what is to be done IF etc.’ but with what is to be done SINCE we are creative intelligent beings that have insight into the ideals of eternity, reality, and goodness, ideals which are real in us and which constitute our reality and our worth. Since we are intelligent, creative beings, since that is our proper character and our true worth, if we understand ourselves as such, there is nothing for us but to live as such. Only that is wholesome for us. That is what Socrates and that is what Plato taught: our true worth, our true well-being, is to live intelligently, is to care for and to preserve that in us which thrives by doing what

**is consistent with intelligence and is harmed by doing what is inconsistent with intelligence: that is the sum of Socrates' life, that is the gist of the whole of Plato's philosophy. It takes away from this to be good because there is a God, to do good because there is a future life. Plato may or may not have believed in a future life, but he, following Socrates, most emphatically held that we must be good because only in being good are we true to ourselves, only by being good do we live the life proper to a human being, a being whose proper character is intelligence. That is why we should not (cannot, rather, if we are true to our humanity) live in deception, that is why we should not follow false or illusory values. And that is the sum of morality.**

**Kant sums up the interest of reason, speculative and practical, in the following three questions: (1) What can I know? (2) What should I do? (3) What may I hope?[xl] I answer these questions as follows:**

**(1) I can know**

**(a) the appearances of things in the outer world, without penetrating to their essence, or origin, or purpose, and**

**(b) the realities within me, principally my own inner reality.**

**(2) I should value, care for, preserve my proper reality as active, creative, intelligence, and should take care not to harm or damage that reality.**

**(3) Any hope beyond my present life is delusion, and in my present life, I may seek to live pleasantly, quietly, happily, but to think that it is in my power to secure that is folly. I cannot expect happiness, and to make happiness a prime end can lead to injury to my only certain good, the integrity of my inner reality.**

**Kant believed he had spoken the last word in philosophy. He was wrong, not due to any defect in his system, but because there is no last word in**

**philosophy. The philosophical endeavour is even more radically insusceptible to completion than the scientific endeavour. Not only must philosophy remain an ever-renewed expression of the reality within us, but philosophy is also necessitated by its own central principle ever to destroy the foundations of its structures — Penelope-like, to be true to her own heart and to her absent lord, ever to unweave by night what she had woven by day.**

## **KANT'S VIOLATION OF THE LIMITS OF PURE REASON**

**On the strength of the separation between the understanding, which applies concepts to phenomena, and pure reason, which reflects on its own ideas, pure reason is found incompetent to pass judgment on the outer world. Yet Kant makes Practical Reason, which should be con-**

cerned solely with moral issues, rule on questions beyond its legitimate jurisdiction. Further, in the *Critique of Judgment*, having given us an area for ‘determinative judgment’ where we have empirical knowledge and another area for ‘reflective judgment’ which yields ‘regulative principles’, Kant inconsistently goes on to make the regulative principles of reflective judgment yield knowledge about God and the immortality of the soul, knowledge which he had shown lies outside the purview both of pure reason and of empirical knowledge.

Thus Kant’s inability to shed off the residue of religious belief harms his philosophical position. He avers that moral belief has an inescapably fixed end and that the only condition under which this end is consistent with all ends as a whole is that there be a God and a future world. [xli] He thus negates the autonomy of morality and turns the categorical imperative into a con-

**ditioned, contingent maxim. Kant condemns himself to live with a split mind when he seeks to combine the above statement with “moral principles ... which I cannot renounce without becoming contemptible in my own eyes”, or to combine his determination to believe in the existence of God and a future life with his categorical denial of the possibility of knowing that there is a God and a future life. A God out there in the world can neither be discovered there by science nor installed there by reason — not even by Practical Reason. The only viable God must be a God confined within the bounds of the mind.**

**Kant says, “Thus I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.” [xlii] This can be and has been put to bad use by proponents of dogmatic religion. When Socrates renounced ‘knowledge’, he did not make room ‘for faith’ but ‘for intelligence’, for active, creative reason. When the mind transcends the limits of**

**knowledge and works purely through pure concepts, it does not give us knowledge or belief – which is pseudo-knowledge – but gives us visions that have intrinsic intelligibility and inherent reality but which do not have and cannot aspire to have reference to objective actuality. The faith that Kant made room for, if Kant were to be consistent with himself, would not mean acquiescence in a definite set of beliefs. It would be the acknowledgment of rational ideals, ideals created by the mind, affirming the reality of creative intelligence.**

**In the *Critique of Judgment* (Section 88, “Restriction of the Validity of the Moral Proof”), while acknowledging that the concept of a final purpose is “merely a concept of our practical reason” and that we cannot “apply it to cognition of nature”, Kant yet insists that “we have a moral basis for thinking that, since there is a world, there also is a final purpose of creation.”**

**[xliii] Thus Kant continues to oscillate between acknowledging that pure reason, working solely with its pure ideas, cannot yield objective knowledge, and his desire to affirm the validity of the postulates of practical reason, between the strict consequences of his critical epistemology and his religious convictions. There is no way to unite these two drives in a common field of knowledge. In trying to accomplish this impossible feat Kant creates for himself an irresolvable dilemma and lays himself open to the charge of inconsistency. Apart from the empirical knowledge we have of the world by the procedures of the sciences, we can know nothing of the world outside us (which includes our own physical being). We can have no answer to ultimate questions when applied to the world. That is a limitation that we have to accept humbly. Theologians and scientists are equally deluded when they think they can answer such questions.**

**Kant allows practical reason “the right to assume something which it would in no way be warranted in presupposing in the field of mere speculation without sufficient grounds of proof; for all such presuppositions injure the perfection of speculation, about which, however, the practical interest does not trouble itself at all.” [xliv]**

**But this concession, which Kant finds necessary in the interest of morality, not only breaches the integrity of the rational being, but is, besides being unjustified, actually unneeded. We have no need to assume the soul, the Good (Kant’s perfect being, God), the All, as objective entities. These are forms that give us, make us into, a reality we actually enjoy here and now within ourselves. Kant could not entirely free himself of the theological dream of a yonder and hereafter. Even Plato was not entirely free of that yearning. But to be completely rational and completely free we have to acknowledge that the only eterni-**

ty we have a right to expect is the eternity of the supra-temporal reality we live ephemerally in our momentary life here and now. — We don't have to assume or assert a reality outside us, for we have all the reality we need within us.

## **BEYOND THE ILLUSIONS OF PURE REASON**

**Kant's 'understanding' corresponds to Plato's *dianoia* (in the Divided Line of the *Republic*: Plato did not stick to any fixed terminology), where the mind can legislate for the phenomenal world because what it may find in the world of regularity is only the order the mind itself confers on the world through ideas born in the mind. Here the mind finds meaning and order in the world as the world presents itself to the mind, but cannot go beyond the immediate presentations of the world. Yet beyond and above the *dianoia*, Plato**

**had a place for *nous, noêsis, phronêsis*. Here the mind is not concerned with the phenomenal world but only with its own pure ideas, which are what is real in the truest sense. Kant too had a region of pure reason where the mind dealt with nothing but its own ideas, but Kant did not have the creative audacity of Plato that made of that region the realm of the highest Reality.**

**Kant tells us that “through the critique of our reason we finally know that we cannot in fact know anything at all in its pure and speculative use”, [xlv] in other words, through the ideas of pure reason alone and through the operations and processes of pure reason alone one cannot have factual, objective, knowledge. From a Platonic position, I readily admit that pure reason has nothing to do with objective truth. Pure reason produces visions of reality that create meaningful worlds within us, worlds in which we, as rational beings, live and move and have our**

**proper human being. These visions are dreams, no more, but it is in these dreams, and only in these dreams, that we have our spiritual life, our spiritual reality. We are creators of worlds of our own and it is in these ideal worlds of ours that we have our worth and our glory or our misery and our perdition. Thus while, by means of reason pure and simple, unaided by empirical experience, we have no knowledge of objects, no objective knowledge, we do have a subjective life that has no need to go to the outside world for confirmation.**

**The pure transcendental ideas – the soul, the final origin of all things, freedom – are, according to Kant, natural to human reason, but they “effect a mere, but irresistible, illusion,” whose deception is hard to resist. [xlvi] The deception Kant wants us to guard against is the deception we fall to in theological or metaphysical speculation when we fancy that we can deduce from the**

**ideas of pure reason the actual constitution of ultimate reality. Kant was right in warning us against the illusion of thinking that pure reason can give us factual knowledge about the world, the All, or ultimate Reality. But in so doing Kant leaves us in want of something of the utmost importance for us as human beings. Though through ‘transcendental ideas’ we can never know the natural world, yet in them we comprehend the world. In the idea of ‘the absolute whole of appearances’ I do not take possession of the whole of appearances but I have possession of the idea of the Whole – an idea in which we humans transcend our ephemerality, our transience, our pettiness. When Thales said that the whole of *phusis* is water, he may have been speaking scientific nonsense (or making a crude start on the way to a scientific theory of the constituents of nature) but he was creating a vision through which he rose above the whole of space**

**and the whole of time, and raised us with him. When Plato weaves of the intelligible forms a picture of the world, he is quick to tell us that the account he gives is no more than a ‘likely tale’, *tôn eikotôn muthôn*. [xlvii] The pure intelligible forms, which give us no objective knowledge, and which cannot be embodied in any definitive theoretical formulation are nevertheless the realm in which we have our intelligent being, in which we live intelligently and have our proper life as human beings. This is the spiritual realm which Kant’s transcendental system fails to account for. It is a mode of life, a plane of being, that has to be, and can only be, realized in constant creation of myth, acknowledged as myth, in art, in poetry, in metaphysical systems that declare themselves to be merely ‘likely tales’, and in the ideals of honour, friendship, loyalty, patriotism, which the cynic has no difficulty in showing to be one and all illusory. The cynic lives in**

**the world of fact, the ‘deluded’ idealist lives in eternal reality.**

**Kant’s critical system undermines the Rationalists’ ‘dogmatic metaphysics’ which aspired to attain super-perceptible knowledge. But without metaphysics, without that ‘super-perceptible knowledge’, we are less than human. Human beings have an ingrained need to relate to the All; they have a need to see themselves whole; they have a need to find in their life and their being meaning and coherence. To live in a world that is not all “sound and fury, signifying nothing”, we need metaphysics, we need the idea of the All, the idea of the soul, the idea of freedom. These are creative ideas which give unity and meaningfulness to the insubstantial, transient givenness of the experiential stream. It is when we endow these ideas with objectivity, with separateness from the intelligence that bred them, that we fall into illusion. I possess my soul, I live intelligently**

**in my ideal world, I am in communion with the God – the absolute Reality – within me; but when I think of my soul as existing apart from my individuality, when I think I can know anything of the world as a whole other than as presented phenomenally in my experience, when I think I can discover a God other than the God within me, then I err. Plato would agree with Kant that objects can be given to us only in sensibility. But the highest order of knowledge for Plato is not knowledge of objects but is the insight of the mind (*nous, phronêsis*) into itself, disclosed in pure ideas engendered by the mind itself. It is true that Plato spoke of the immortality of the soul, of the origination of the cosmos, of a celestial sphere of eternal forms, of God and gods in the yonder and hereafter; in all of that Plato was a poet giving creative expression to the realities bred by the mind: it is in such dreams that the creative mind lives its own reality. That**

**‘super-perceptible knowledge’ was alone for Plato to true *epistêmê*. The super-perceptible ideas and the Form of the Good that constitute the highest knowledge, are affirmed and expressed in thoughts and myths that must be constantly subjected to dialectic demolishing. In Plato the only reality that abides is *phronêsis*, the mind as pure creative activity.**

**Kant ends the section “On the impossibility of an ontological proof of God’s existence” with a short paragraph which shows clearly how Kant’s outlook falls short of Plato’s. After denouncing the futility of attempting to prove the existence of a highest being from concepts, Kant affirms that “a human being can no more become richer in insight from mere ideas than a merchant could in resources if he wanted to improve his financial state by adding a few zeros to his cash balance.” [xlviii] Anselm, Descartes, Leibniz, all had an inkling of a ‘truth of the heart’. We have the idea**

**of a perfect being. That idea must be ‘real’. They sought to prove that by logical demonstration. Kant shows that their logic was faulty. Thus far he is in the right. But when he goes on to assert that a human being cannot “become richer in insight by mere ideas”, he misses something — indeed, I would say, he negates what is most important in the philosophical endeavour. Plato did not try to prove the ‘existence’ of the Form of the Good. He proclaimed that the Form of the Good is all that we know of what is truly real. Our conception of the Good is what gives us reality, what makes us real. While on a lower plane the ideas engendered in the mind shed intelligibility on the phenomenal world, on a higher plane, philosophy, in its pure use, gives us insight into and understanding of the life of intelligence in us that is the only real thing we know. Philosophy gives us ourselves, gives us our reality.**

**Metaphysics at its best is mythologizing — a mythologizing that affirms the reality of creative intelligence. It is this that vouchsafes its rationality. Formally, the rationality of such mythologizing consists in its intelligibility, its intrinsic coherence. I understand dialectic not as logical deduction and demonstration, but, with the Plato of the *Republic*, as the annihilation of all the grounds of our reasoning[xlix] — an annihilation that leaves us with nothing but the pure activity of creative reasoning itself, with pure creative intelligence as the final reality.**

**Shakespeare takes a silly and improbable story as the framework for a play and then makes us live through passions, emotions, and reflections more real than much of what we encounter or experience in the ‘real’ world. This is akin to what philosophers who engage in metaphysical system-building do: they create for us ideal worlds endowed with meaningfulness.**

## NOTES

(followed by Additional Notes)

[i] *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

[ii] *Critique of Judgment*, translated by Werner S. Pluhar, Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.

[iii] See my *Plato: An Interpretation* (2005), ch. 3 “The Socratic Elenchus”.

[iv] *Parmenides* 130e.

[v] *Phaedo* 95e-101e.

[vi] My own usage of the terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’ differs from Kant’s, but in discussing Kant’s position the terms have the sense given them by Kant. I have to ask the reader’s indulgence for this discrepancy.

**[vii] For a fuller discussion see my *Plato: An Interpretation*, pp.126-129.**

**[viii] Those who speak of a so-called Theory of Forms of the youthful Plato that he discarded in his later years are misled by Aristotle who constructed the putative ‘theory’ out of Plato’s experimentations with encapsulating the basic insight in a verbal formula, experimentations with the outcome of none of which Plato could rest satisfied. Once more I have to refer the reader to my *Plao: An Interpretation*, ch.1, pp.30-44, and ch.5, pp.117-122. (What other members of the Academy made of the ‘theory’ is another matter.)**

**[ix] *Phaedo* 79c-d.**

**[x] *Phaedrus* 247b-278e.**

**[xi] Plato’s Seventh Letter 341c-344a.**

**[xii] *Republic* 533c.**

- [xiii]** Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, I.5, tr. R. J. Hollingdale.
- [xiv]** A51, B75, p.193-4.
- [xv]** Introduction, A15, B29, p.135 and pp.151-2.
- [xvi]** B161, p.262.
- [xvii]** Bxii, p.108.
- [xviii]** Bxiii, p.109.
- [xix]** A125, p.241.
- [xx]** A126, p.242.
- [xxi]** A127, p.242.
- [xxii]** Preface to the second edition, Bxvi, p.110.
- [xxiii]** A236, B295, pp.354-5.
- [xxiv]** B146, p.254.
- [xxv]** B148, p.255.
- [xxvi]** Kant, agreeing with Aristotle's usage, takes dialectic to be a logic of illusion (*Schein*).

**This is diametrically opposed to Plato's usage, where dialectic (in the *Republic* anyhow) is the highest level of philosophizing. It is best to keep the difference within its proper limits as a different choice of terminology.**

**[xxvii] A327, B383, p.402.**

**[xxviii] A334, B391, p.405.**

**[xxix] A334, B391, pp.405-6.**

**[xxx] A70, B95, p.206.**

**[xxxii] B275-6, p.327.**

**[xxxii] A22, B37, p.157 and p.174.**

**[xxxiii] B278, p.328.**

**[xxxiv] B152-3, p.257.**

**[xxxv] Since we are part of the universe there is no absolute autonomy for any particular thing.**

**[xxxvi] A450, B478, p.486.**

**[xxxvii] A533, B561, p.533.**

**[xxxviii] A798, B826, p.673.**

**[xxxix] A800, B828, pp.674-5.**

**[xl] A805, B833, p.677.**

**[xli] A828, B856, p.689.**

**[xlii] Preface to the second edition, Bxxx, p.117.**

**[xliii] Ak.454-5, p.345.**

**[xliv] A776, B804, p.662.**

**[xlv] A769, B797, pp.658-9.**

**[xlvi] A642, B670, p.590.**

**[xlvii] *Timaeus* 59c.**

**[xlviii] A602, B630, p.569.**

**[xlix] *Republic* 533c-d.**

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES**

**\*1)' Mind' here has to be taken in the widest possible sense. Our moral ideals and values do**

**not come from conceptual thought but arise from the whole of our subjective life. I believe that the baby's feeling when at its mother's breast contributes to the sense of belonging to a wider world and the sense of attachment to the other. It is not unreasonable to think that even the subjective state of the foetus in the womb underlies our moral constitution. These primal life experiences are either fostered by a good education or smothered by bad influences.**

**\*2) I don't know how, but somehow I was misled or rather misled myself into believing that this statement appeared in the first edition and was omitted in the second as I affirmed in some of my writings.**

**\*3) Perhaps, to avoid a needless misinterpretation, we should say there would not be any nature at all for us". Kant actually makes the nec-**

essary reservation but in his complicated technical phraseology.

**\*4) In the ‘autobiographical’ passage of the *Phaedo* Socrates affirms this insight in the boldest terms. He says that he will admit no ‘cause’ for the becoming of ‘two’ other than the Form of the Two (*Phaedo* 96e ff.).**

**\*5) This does not include what Kant terms ‘Ideas of pure reason’ which he assigns to Practical Reason. (See “Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*” below.)**

**\*6) Kant’s language makes it appear as if the mind (reason) were constituted of so many actually separate compartments. This is bound to create formal difficulties. All theory breaks up what is whole. This is necessary; but it breeds error when we forget that the division and separation is *ad hoc*, artificial. Healthy thinking is an**

**ongoing correction of itself. This is dialectic that undermines all presuppositions.**

**\*7) The concept of the soul is a metaphysical notion as the soul itself is a metaphysical reality. This can never be cognized as an object: it is pure subjectivity shining in its own light. What we apprehend objectively are states of determinate consciousness and what we represent to ourselves as ourselves is a mental construct. This is where and how all introspective psychology tumbles. Bergson would have said Yea to this.**

**\*8) Kant speaks of a “faculty of apperception”. The same old Third Man riddle. Apperception needs no faculty to apperceive itself any more than Will needs a Will to will. Conceptual thinking creates phantom windmills against which it valiantly wields its Sancho Panza phantom lance.**

**\*9) To me ‘the final condition of the possibility of experience’ is that our inner essence, our *nou-***

***menon*, is creative intelligence. I see no other answer to the mystery, the reality, of our thinking, feeling, experiencing, in other words, of our subjectivity, which materialist empiricists take as unthinkingly as a mosquito takes in the blood it sucks.**

**\*10) What Socrates saw as specifically characterizing human beings are the ideas, ideals, values, that govern our voluntary activities, but our inner reality and ‘our whole worth’ is something wider and deeper that we share with all living things, it is Life itself, it is ultimately intelligent creativity.**

## **KANT, *CRITIQUE OF PRACTIAL REASON***

**[Part Two of “Free Will as Creativity” included  
in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009]**

**The whole controversy about free will (the modern, scientific, as opposed to the earlier theological version) should have been put to rest with Kant’s first *Critique*. In the words of the Preface to the second *Critique*, transcendental freedom, freedom in the absolute sense, is required by speculative reason “in its use of the concept of causality in order to escape the antinomy into which it inevitably falls, when in the chain of cause and effect it tries to think the *unconditioned*” (p. 13). (Page references are to T. K. Ab-**

bott's translation, 1996, from which all quotations below are taken.)

In the first *Critique* Kant finds that reason can only see the phenomenal world as a world of insubstantial shadows, which reason conjectures must have noumenal support, which however we can never know. But within us, in the moral act, we find that noumenon real and full of life, and only there do we have true causality. That is the long and the short of it.

Where Kant goes wrong is in trying to establish the reality of freedom apodictically. True, he only purports to establish the necessity of the concept of freedom. But then, on his own principles – and as his critics were not slow to show – that does not prove the existence of freedom. There can be no proof of that, for freedom is not the kind of thing that can 'exist'. (I wanted to write 'exist objectively', but that would have clashed with Kant's own usage where 'objective' signifies rational, just as 'practical' with him signifies moral.) So Kant's winged words about

**‘the moral sense within’ sway the minds of more people than are persuaded by his theoretical arguments for the necessity of the concept.**

**Kant tortures himself and his readers by soaring into the thin air of second-order and third-order concepts in the hope of proving the actuality of moral freedom. He should have spared himself the trouble by acknowledging that however much we refine and sophisticate our theory, at some point we have to stop and say with Socrates, It is by Beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful. The idea of freedom is a reality; it has no actuality (existence) that can be discovered by any means, and the only ‘proof’ of its reality is its self-evidence. Any other ‘proof’ can be a precious piece of intellectual artistry, but can always be ‘proved’ to be flawed.**

**In the same way the ideas of God and ‘Immortality’ (understood as eternity of the soul) are realities that give meaning to life, yet theoretically, as Kant himself admits, they remain mere ‘possibilities’. Nothing can show them as actualities. The idea of freedom does not differ essen-**

**tially from these. Kant asserts that there is a difference because he chooses to see the actualization of the moral law in the practical sphere as proof of the actuality of moral freedom. This only makes for confusion.**

**To understand Kant you have to think in terms of his concepts. That is, you have to put aside all you have learned and all you have thought for yourself, put on Kant's mind, and think with that mind. Then you will see that everything must be just as Kant says it is. This of course is true in the case of all original thinkers, but as Kant has created a whole new conceptual world, it is more evident in his case.**

**The radical solution in modern times to the problem of free will (if it is to be regarded as a problem) is found in Kant's distinction between the subject as phenomenon and the subject as noumenon. The phenomenal subject is part of nature and acts under natural law.\* The noumenal subject is autonomous and free. This should have been sufficient to resolve the problem. All**

**our acts have sufficient reason; nothing we do contradicts natural law; on the other hand, all acts done by us as persons are autonomous, spontaneous, and free. But Kant accepted without question the scientific presuppositions of his time, and hence could not remove altogether the apparent contradiction between phenomenal determinism and noumenal freedom. In this, Kant is in the same position as Spinoza whose great insight into the reality of moral autonomy was unduly limited by his unquestioning acceptance of causal determinism.**

**Kant is the opposite pole to Plato. Plato lets his philosophical insights clothe themselves in whatever conceptual garb they chance to find handy. A sympathetic reader can always easily penetrate to his meaning, and critics can always feast on his apparent contradictions. Kant's fondness for intricate, majestic theoretical structures obscures his great insights, and while admirers revel (justly) in the 'perfect' consistence of his towering architectonics (a favourite word with him), unfriendly critics can always find in**

**the detailed concepts and minute distinctions infinite faults and endless contradictions, for nothing determinate can be free of imperfection.**

**Kant formulates Problem I in the Analytic thus: “Supposing that the mere legislative form of maxims is alone the sufficient determining principle of a will, to find the nature of the will which can be determined by it alone” (p.43). He finds that “such a will must be conceived as quite independent on the natural law of phenomena in their mutual relation, namely, the law of causality; such independence is called *freedom* in the strictest, that is in the transcendental sense; consequently, a will which can have its law in nothing but the mere legislative form of the maxim is a free will” (p. 43). A fine exercise in formal reasoning. But if someone is to understand what it is to suppose the legislative form of maxims to be the determining principle of a will, that someone must have experienced the reality of free will. If, with Socrates, we begin with the self-evidence of the reality, we need no proof; if we rely on proof, anyone who does not acknowledge the reality can**

**justly accuse us of playing tricks with words. (Anyone acquainted with contemporary philosophy can name a score of professional philosophers who will readily sign their names to that accusation.)**

**Kant’s philosophy of the Categorical Imperative gives creative expression to the reality of the moral experience. It builds a theoretical structure to articulate the reality. That is all any theory ever does: no theory exhausts the reality it represents; no theory is ever definitive; all reality is inexhaustible. (For a defence of these bald and bold utterances, see my *Let Us Philosophize*, passim, “Philosophy as Prophecy”, etc.) The theoretical edifices that can be erected to represent any given reality are without limit — just as poetic images of love are without limit; and if poets in our day no longer speak of love, it is not because the subject has been exhausted, but because there is so little of love in our modern life.**

**After telling us that what gives actions moral worth is “*that the moral law should directly de-***

*termine the will*”, Kant tells us that “as to the question how a law can be directly and of itself a determining principle of the will (which is the essence of morality), this is, for human reason, an insoluble problem and identical with the question: how a free will is possible” (pp. 92-93). This is the deontological riddle that Kant has left as a legacy to philosophical controversy, to the endless delight of professional philosophers. Kant’s addiction to ‘pure’ concepts lies behind the riddle. For him all immediacy smacks of the empirical. He creates concepts and distinctions and decides that these form the whole content of pure reason. He does not see that this alienates from reason the realities that those concepts and distinctions were created to represent. Thus while maintaining that “the objective reality of the moral law cannot be proved by any deduction ... [nor] proved *a posteriori* by experience, and yet it is firmly established of itself” (pp. 64-65), he still denies that we have any intuition of the moral law, but only a concept of the form of the law.

**Kant rightly insists that autonomy as such does not preclude determinism. He insists that “it does not matter whether the principles which necessarily determine causality by a physical law reside *within* the subject or *without* him, or in the former case whether these principles are instinctive or are conceived by reason, if ... these determining ideas have the ground of their existence in time and in the *antecedent state*, and this again in an antecedent &c.” (p. 118). He rightly insists that moral freedom transcends causal determinism, but as he still upholds the validity of causal determinism for phenomena he has to rest content with an unresolved contradiction between the phenomenal and the noumenal orders. I maintain that this contradiction can only be overcome by the principle of creativity as an ultimate dimension of reality.**

**For Kant there is no speculative answer to the apparent contradiction of physical causality and freedom of the will. There is only a practical answer which Kant explicitly describes as faith. And of Kant’s three Postulates of Practical Rea-**

**son – the existence of God, freedom of the will, and the immortality of the soul – it is only the freedom of the will of which we have immediate awareness and which can therefore claim the self-evidence of an idea engendered by the mind. Had Kant chosen to be more consistent with his own critical philosophy and maintain that none of these ideas can be admitted to give us any knowledge of any existents external to our minds, he would have found the ideas of God (as ideal perfection) and the soul (as supra-temporal reality) possessed of the same self-evidence as intelligible realities, needing no proof and capable of no proof.**

**It hardly needs saying that a free will is not capricious. Kant says that a free will is determined by the form of the law. We can say that a free will is determined by a principle or an ideal. The principle of sufficient reason is satisfied, and that is causal determinism if you will. Wherein then does the freedom of a free will consist? First, in autonomy: that is compatible with determinism: that is Spinoza's freedom. More im-**

**portant, free will is creative spontaneity, which shows that such determinism, if we have to use the word, demands the sufficiency of the grounds of the act, but does not dictate the outcome.**

**Shakespeare scribbling a sonnet — every word, every syllable, is sufficiently grounded and literary critics and scholars can analytically reduce the sonnet to the motives, beliefs, prejudices, influences, desires, and what not, that went to its making. But Laplace's God could not foretell**

**But flowers distill'd, though they with  
winter meet,  
Leese but their show, their substance still  
lives sweet.**

**\*This is how Kant puts it and that causes him trouble. I would rather say: The phenomenal subject is part of nature and its motions, objectively observed, can be represented in terms of natural laws.**

# KANT

[Chapter Seven of *Quest of Realoty*, 2013]

## I: BEFORE KANT

**Alfred North Whitehead calls the seventeenth century the century of genius. He denies it the more usual designation of the age of reason. It was in the Scholastic age that thinkers relied completely on reason. In the seventeenth century people discovered that, in seeking knowledge, it availed them to use their senses. For the Greeks, astronomy was a mathematical discipline. Galileo Galilei although originally a mathematician yet watched objects dropped from a tower, watched a swinging chandelier, and made his**

own telescope to watch the planets and stars. Francis Bacon proclaimed the credo of all objective science, that experience is the source of genuine knowledge and championed induction as the proper method for science. Thomas Hobbes confirmed the materialistic character of scientific knowledge.

Fate placed Descartes at the right time at the right place and he unwittingly became instrumental in changing the course of philosophy as the falling of a rock might give a stream a new course. But I do not see Descartes as making any contribution of much value to philosophy. His splitting of the human being into two distinct substances did much harm to philosophical thought, with due apologies to thinkers who regard the *Cogito* as an affirmation of subjectivity.

The weakest element in Descartes' *Cogito* is the *ergo*. *Cogito ergo sum* (together with its

French, English, and other renderings), as an inference, is false and superfluous. Its theoretical falsehood has been shown by many thinkers. Besides, our inner reality is self-evident. It is the one reality of which we have immediate unshakeable awareness. I have somewhere written that Parmenides should have started not from *esti* (It is) but from *eimi* (I am). Our reality is all the reality we know firmly and indubitably.

The rationalism preached in Descartes' "*Method*" – properly the method of mathematics – was not attuned to the mood of exploration and experimentation of the age. It was immediately embraced not by science but by philosophy to its harm. When science later on caught the infection it was not in the areas where science was realizing its most dazzling achievements but in dogmatic determinism and in Leibniz' dream of a *characteristica universalis*, a bright idea that could be put to good use, but has in the hands of

**Analytical Philosophers become the worst blight of modern philosophy. Wittgenstein discovered its vacuity and was led to despair but other academic philosophers have blithely continued to ply it, in the form of symbolic logic, as a lucrative trade.**

**John Locke may be seen as the founder of the empirical theory of knowledge. In opposition to Descartes' rationalism for which true knowledge is the knowledge of clear and distinct ideas, Locke held that true knowledge is knowledge of facts. According to his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the mind of a human being at birth is a *tabula rasa*, a blank tablet. (Locke borrowed the term *tabula rasa* from the Scholastics who in turn had inherited it from the Stoics.) All the ideas with which the mind is later furnished come originally from simple sense impressions. Locke deserves to be called the sage of British Empiricism. He laid down the theory pure and**

simple, but in his own thinking was always prepared to break through its boundaries. His great *Essay* is, to his credit, full of inconsistencies, as Whitehead has seen. Whitehead lauds Locke as being in British philosophy “the analogue to Plato, in the epoch of his life, in personal endowments, in width of experience, and in dispassionate statement of conflicting intuitions” (*Process and Reality*, p.60). Repeatedly in *Process and Reality* Whitehead cites the latter parts of Locke’s *Essay* as agreeing with the philosophy of organism; he finds such agreement with the philosophy of organism in Locke’s doctrine of time as a ‘perpetual perishing’ and in Locke’s depiction of “simple ideas conveyed in by the senses, as they are found in exterior things”. In the Introduction to his translation of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* Werner S. Pluhar writes that Locke “argued for the existence of a perfect God on the ground that the self-evident existence of oneself, as a mind

capable of perception and knowledge (which cannot arise from mere matter), presupposes such a God. For ‘whatever is first of all things must necessarily contain in it, and actually have, at least, all the perfections that can ever after exist ...’.” This was of course a tenet of Medieval theology, but it is significant that Locke found it consistent with his philosophy. It amounts, of course, to a radical rejection of the reductionism that is the most pernicious feature of Empiricism.

In *A Treatise of Human Nature* David Hume, starting from Locke’s *tabula rasa* draws the logical consequences. First he introduces an important distinction between impressions and ideas. The original impressions come to us from an unknown source. (Here Hume was not as radically consistent as Berkeley. If originally we know nothing but our impressions we cannot say that these come from things or objects.) Once the

live impressions are gone, what remains in the receptacle of the mind are “faint images” to which Hume attached the name “ideas”. In drawing the consequences of his presuppositions the arch-Empiricist is strictly rationalistic. He does not recognize a permanent self that continues over time. We are never aware of anything other than the successive impressions and ideas. But whether Galileo did or did not murmur “*Eppur se muove*” I am sure that Hume’s transcendent self or mind or soul was always mischievously singing the *Cogito* to a Bach melody, without committing the Cartesian fallacy because she did not claim to be a substance: how could she be transcendent if she were chained to Existence? Patience, dear reader, the riddle will be resolved when we come to Creative Eternity.

Two more far-reaching conclusions that Hume drew consistently from his presuppositions were: (1) The notion of causality is without

**empirical foundation. We can observe one thing following another but cannot know that there is a necessary connection between the two. All that we are justified in affirming is that we observe a constant conjunction between two impressions. It was primarily to answer this challenge that Kant built his towering transcendental system. (2) In the sphere of action, from the observation of facts, of what is the case, we are not justified in deriving the idea of moral obligation, the moral ‘ought’. Kant tried to answer this in his doctrine of the Categorical Imperative, but I think that Kant was not as fully successful here as in dealing with the problem of causality.**

**“To hate, to love, to think, to feel, to see; all this is nothing but to perceive” says Hume (*Treatise*, I, II, VI). It would be better to say, all this is accompanied by apperception (to borrow Kant’s term), or, all this has a subjective aspect. The fault of Hume, and of Locke except when he al-**

lows himself to be inconsistent, is that they leave out the activity of the mind. Hume allows the mind a faculty for joining ideas, “but we are only to regard it as a gentle force, which commonly prevails, and is the cause why, among other things, languages so nearly correspond to each other; Nature, in a manner, pointing out to every one those simple ideas, which are most proper to be united into a complex one” (*Treatise*, I, I, IV). But this ‘gentle force’ does not amount to an activity on the part of the mind; it has no legitimacy, no authority, and that is the ground for Hume’s devastating scepticism. Hume inconsistently prefers to allow Nature to point out “those simple ideas, which are most proper to be united into a complex one” rather than allow the mind any active role.

Hume says that whatever is “perceived by the eyes ... must be a color”. I have two reservations here. The eyes do not perceive; it is the mind

**(the whole person) that perceives. And whatever is received by the eyes cannot be simply a color but must be a figure which combines shape and color, even if the shape is hazy, nebulous, and undefined; and it is only perceived when clothed in an idea produced by the mind.**

## **II: KANT'S CRITICAL SYSTEM**

**[This section contained a revised version of "Kant and Plato", given above as the first paper in this volume. I am therefore omitting it here.]**

## **III: KANT'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY**

***[In "Free Will as Creativity" (included in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009) I commented on the Critique of Practical Reason (reproduced above). Here I give some marginal notes on Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. All***

*quotations below are taken from Mary Gregor's translation (1997) and cite the pagination of the standard German edition of Kant's works, giving the volume number and page number preceded by the letters AK (for 'Akademy').]*

\*

**According to Kant, apart from logic, which deals with the form of thought, philosophy which is concerned with the 'matter' of thought deals either with the laws of nature or with the laws of freedom; these two domains are designated physics and ethics respectively, or the doctrine of nature (*Naturlehre*) and the doctrine of morals (*Sittenlehre*) (Preface to the *Groundwork*, AK 4:387). We need not concern ourselves here with Kant's further intricate distinctions and sub-divisions.**

**Kant intends to "work out for once a pure moral philosophy, completely cleansed of everything that may be only empirical" (Preface, AK**

4:3890). In this, to my mind, Kant mistakes the nature of moral philosophy and the nature of philosophical thinking in general. Although I maintain that there is a unique source of all morality, namely, the integrity of our subjective inner reality, yet there can be no sole definitive formulation of “a pure moral philosophy” precluding all others.

Kant states that “in the case of what is to be morally good it is not enough that it *conform* with the moral law but it must also be done *for the sake of the law*” (Preface, AK 4:390). Further on he says that “to explicate the concept of a will that is to be esteemed in itself and that is good apart from any further purpose ... we shall set before ourselves the concept of duty, which contains that of a good will ...” (AK 4:397). Kant does not mean to deny that acts motivated by pity or sympathy or the sheer joy of doing good are morally good. At AK 4:398 we read that

**“there are many souls so sympathetically attuned that, without any other motive of vanity or self-interest they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy around them and can take delight in the satisfaction of others”. But he goes on to say, “But I assert that in such a case an action of this kind ... has ... no moral worth ...”. Here we encounter Kant’s much maligned ‘deontology’, yet he is innocent of much of the nonsense that has been woven around it just as he is innocent of the word itself which was only introduced into philosophical discussion by C. D. Broad in *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, 1930, 1934. Kant does not deny that such acts are good, but his concern here is with pure conceptual form. He means to isolate, theoretically, acts that strictly fit into his particular theoretical definition of a moral act. His own Pietistic upbringing, possibly his temperamental reclusiveness or congenital emotional tepidity, may have hidden for him the narrow-**

ness of his definition, but that does not justify all the hard things that have been said of his moral stance. Kant justifies the stringency of his moral criterion by pointing out that “a ground that is not moral will indeed now and then produce actions in conformity with the law, but it will often produce actions contrary to the law” (Preface, AK 4:390). A suckling mother, entrusted with an orphaned infant certainly does wrong if, in caring for her own baby she lets the other go hungry. But then, does not Kant’s own supreme moral law admit of exceptions?

Kant tells us that “to preserve one’s life is a duty” (AK 4:397). On what ground? This shows how, when we come down to particular maxims we necessarily enter into the world of the relative and the uncertain. Kant’s gravest fault was to believe that we can derive from general moral principles particular maxims with certainty and with absolute validity and applicability in all cir-

**cumstances. This can and does lead to tragic stances and fanatic positions. The interminable and often quite unreasonable controversies raging over such questions as abortion or euthanasia are evidence of this. Thus Kant's argument concerning suicide (AK 4:429) shows what is wrong with considering any definite formulation of a principle as absolute or definitive. I take the principle that a human being is to be regarded as an end in herself or himself to mean that we are to see what is characteristically human in us as what is of the highest value in us. If for one reason or another I cannot live a truly worthy human life, then I can consistently decide to end my life. Isn't that the decision nature takes on our behalf when natural death ends the life of those no longer able to live a fully human life? Also, what Kant says about the duty to keep promises, the duty to serve the happiness of others, and so on, would gain rather than lose if stated simply**

**as ideals without any attempt at proof or demonstration. And again these maxims cannot escape the relativity that necessarily comes with all particularity and all finitude: this is the great lesson of the Socratic elenchus.**

**At AK 4:406 Kant admits that “no certain example can be cited of the disposition to act from pure duty”. Necessarily, since all theoretical representation (taking the expression in the broadest possible sense) abstracts from the total actuality, which is always an integral whole. When Kant goes on to say that “though much may be done *in conformity with* what *duty* commands, still it is always doubtful whether it is really done *from duty* and therefore has moral worth” — is it reasonable to suppose that he means to deny that such acts have moral worth? His concern is with pure theory. It is not the business of philosophy to pass judgment on particular acts.**

**Is Kant’s view of duty irreconcilable with the view of philosophers who have “ascribed everything to more or less refined self-love”? If my refined self-love prescribes that I aspire to the highest and purest ideal, that I be good, then self-love and self-denial unite. Indeed, I maintain that all pure morality – Buddhist, Socratic, Stoic, Christian, Spinozist, Kantian – is of the selfsame essence, the difference between its various representations resides in the hue reflected by different circumstances. By a pure morality I mean a morality of autonomy as opposed to a morality of authority. A morality of autonomy says: It is good to be good: to be good makes you intrinsically worthy. A morality of authority says: It is good to obey God, the law, your parent, your ruler. Kant’s morality is at heart autonomous, but he presents it in a manner that makes it seem to be heteronomous. His is at heart the morality of the good will, which is a morality of freedom,**

**but his addiction to theoretical ‘completeness’ makes him represent it as a morality of duty, Which is the negation of freedom.**

**“But whence have we the concept of God as the highest good? Solely from the *idea* of moral perfection that reason frames a priori and connects inseparably with the concept of a free will” AK 4:408/9. This is a view I have repeatedly expressed in my writings. (See *Plato: An Interpretation*, p.175.) I was pleasantly surprised to find it so neatly expressed by Kant. Surely this undermines the idea of revelation. I am tempted to recall here words I have already quoted once before in “What Is God?” (*The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009): “The birth of the idea of God in the mind – the judgment ‘Reality is living, divine, a God exists’ – is so subtle, like the faintest breath of the spirit upon the face of the waters, that no look within can tell whether God is here revealing himself to man, or man creating God”**

**(William Ernest Hocking, “The Will as a Maker of Truth”, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, 1912, reproduced in *Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1954, ed. Daniel J. Bronstein and Harold M. Schulweis, p.20).**

**I would not say with Kant that “because moral laws are to hold for every rational being as such” we have “to derive them from the universal concept of a rational being as such” (AK 4:412). Rather, it is the other way round, it is from our experience of the moral act, from our insight into the reality of moral creativity, that we get the idea of ourselves as rational beings.**

**Kant formulates his single categorical imperative thus: “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law”, but says that it can also be expressed as follows: “act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your**

**will a universal law of nature” (AK 4:421). I cannot see, despite all of Kant’s derivations and deductions, what makes that the one and only supreme moral principle. It is one good representation of genuine moral insight; but there are others that are equally good. I leave the criticism of Kant’s detailed arguments to those who think that philosophical positions require proof or are amenable to proof.**

**In connection with the attempt – or the need – to prove a priori that there is indeed a moral imperative, Kant says, “Here, then, we see philosophy put in fact in a precarious position, which is to be firm even though there is nothing in heaven or on earth from which it depends or on which it is based” (AK 4:426). To my mind, this is, on the contrary, the source of the strength and the certainty of philosophy, that it depends on “nothing in heaven or on earth” but is grounded in the one reality of which we have**

**immediate knowledge, which is that very moral reality whose reality Kant so vainly labors to prove. Kant himself comes round to this in his own way when he suggests that we “suppose there were something the *existence of which in itself* has an absolute worth, something which as *an end in itself* could be a ground of determinate laws; then in it, and in it alone, would lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative, that is, of a practical law” (AK 4:428). That ‘something’ is what Socrates refers to as that within us which prospers by doing what is right and suffers by doing what is wrong. What proof do we have that there is such a something? The reality of it: and the reality of it comes into being with our proclamation of its reality. Thus Kant’s ‘deduction’ of the ground of the categorical imperative amounts to a prophetic proclamation of the reality of the good will.**

**The ‘practical imperative’ that Kant derives from the principle that “rational nature exists as an end in itself” runs as follows: “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (AK 4:429). I do not see any sense in speaking of any derivations or of laws here, any more than I see any sense in Descartes’ trying to prove his existence from the fact that he thinks. The Kantian imperative is an ideal, an ideal that generates in me my reality: that reality is *my* reality; I can never prove it convincingly to another and I have no need to prove it to myself.**

**The principle of humanity as an end in itself, according to Kant, is not borrowed from experience and must arise from pure reason (AK 4:430-431). Certainly, yet not as an inference or a deduction, but as an oracular proclamation of creative intelligence expressing its own intrinsic**

**reality. Just as I said of Spinoza that he draws all the demonstrations of his *Ethics* from the creative notions he has put into his definitions and axioms, I say of Kant that he derives all his proofs from what he has put into the creative ideas which are his true starting point, not the other way round.**

**Kant is right in identifying the principle of true morality as the principle of autonomy, in contrast with principles of heteronomy. The principle of autonomy is clearly and fully realized in Socratic morality and in the morality of love advanced in parts of the Christian Gospels. Kant says, “Autonomy is ... the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature” (AK 4:436). I say that the essence of humanity, the inner reality of a human being, is creative intelligence. For Socrates-Plato *psychê*, *nous*, *phronêsis* are one thing and that one thing is that within us which thrives by doing good**

**things and is harmed by doing bad things. I think all of that comes to the same thing.**

**The idea of a kingdom of ends is another beautiful creation of Kant's, but when he speaks in AK 4:433 of a rational being belonging to the kingdom of ends not as member but as sovereign, he is obviously doing that to make room for God, as is evident from the first paragraph in AK 4:434. But does not that turn the morality into one of heteronomy instead of autonomy?**

**Kant rightly rejects the theological concept "which derives morality from a divine, all-perfect will". He rightly insists that the concept of such a divine will "made up of the attributes of desire for glory and dominion combined with dreadful representations of power and vengeance, would have to be the foundation for a system of morals that would be directly opposed to morality" (AK 4:443). Does not this spell the end**

**of all institutionalized religion? Yet it does not go beyond what Plato intimated in the *Euthyphro*.**

**Christine M. Korsgaard commenting on “A free person is one whose actions are not determined by any external force, not even by his own desires” says, “This is merely a negative conception of freedom” (Introduction to Mary Gregor’s translation of the *Groundwork*, p.xxvi). Though negative in form, the statement gives expression to a positive and affirmative conception of freedom as complete autonomy, fully agreeing with Spinoza’s position.**

**In Kant’s transcendental system, the principle that every event must have a cause is only relevant to the phenomenal world\*. Strictly speaking, we should not speak of causality in connection with the moral world, which is truly noumenal. In the moral sphere we have, not causality, but creativity. When Kant speaks of the**

**will as the causality of a rational being, thus transporting the concept of causality from the phenomenal to the noumenal sphere, he opens up another source of the needless complications that he creates for himself. It would save us much unnecessary confusion if we say that moral acts (the equivalent of events in the phenomenal world) do not have a cause, but an integral motive, a purpose, an end. I am not content to say with Kant that “we have grounds for regarding ourselves as free”. I say that we are immediately and indubitably aware of our freedom, or better said, that we immediately and indubitably experience our freedom. The tension between seeing our actions on the one hand as falling under the laws of nature and on the other hand as governed by the moral law is transcended by the principle of creativity.**

**Because Kant, in spite of his transcendental philosophy, could not free himself from the de-**

**terministic presupposition of the natural science of his day\*\***, he was powerless to resolve the conflict between the autonomy of the will and the supposed heteronomy of nature. He failed to see that the ‘a priori cognition’ of the ‘laws of nature’ did not entail necessitation but only intelligibility. For this ‘concept of nature’ which must, in his own words, “unavoidably be supposed if experience, that is, coherent cognition of objects of the senses in accordance with universal laws, is to be possible”, is indeed nothing but that, a supposition, a fiction. So when he goes on to say, “Hence freedom is only an *idea* of reason, the objective reality of which is in itself doubtful, whereas nature is a *concept of the understanding* that proves, and must necessarily prove, its reality in examples from experience” (AK 4:455), I would say that, quite on the contrary, while the concept of the understanding has constantly to go to Nature begging validation of its judgment,

**the ‘idea of freedom’ is forever secure in the self-evidence of its reality.**

**Kant vainly tries to extricate himself from the dilemma between the demands of reason ‘for speculative purposes’ and ‘for practical purposes’. He says, “Philosophy must therefore assume that no true contradiction will be found between freedom and natural necessity in the very same human actions, for it cannot give up the concept of nature any more than that of freedom” (AK 4:456). But the contradiction will continue stubbornly to stare us in the face unless and until we say that one of the pair – freedom and natural necessity – is a reality and the other a fiction. You can have your choice, but you cannot eat your cake and have it.**

**It is because Kant’s transcendental idealism remains an epistemological project with no metaphysical depth that he has to say that “we shall**

**never be able to comprehend how freedom is possible” (AK 4: 456). Further on Kant says, “But reason would overstep all its bounds if it took it upon itself to *explain how* pure reason can be practical, which would be exactly the same task as to explain *how freedom is possible*” (AK 4:458/459). In a full-blooded idealism we do not have to ‘comprehend’ freedom because freedom is just the spontaneity of creative intelligence; or say, ‘we’ do not have to comprehend freedom because *we* are just that freedom comprehending itself. It is the projection of a ‘we’ external to and opposed to our inner reality that has been landing modern philosophy in all kinds of quandaries and contradictions. I do not understand myself; my understanding is myself; I am my understanding.**

**“For we can explain nothing but what we can reduce to laws the object of which can be given in some possible experience” (AK 4:459). This**

sums up in a nutshell the whole tug of war between science and philosophy. The ‘explanation’ that is given by laws the object of which can be given in experience is the fruit of science and relates to the outside, objective, world, and yields what Kant terms understanding but I would term knowledge. The other kind of explanation, the explanation that Socrates sought when he decided to give up looking for ‘causes’ *‘en tois ergo- is’* and to seek them instead *‘en tois logois’*, that other kind can only be found when the mind looks within itself and sees the idea shining in its own effulgence. That is what I call philosophical understanding and philosophical explanation. Kant continues, “Freedom, however, is a mere idea, the objective reality of which can in no way be presented in accordance with laws of nature and so too cannot be presented in any possible experience ...” The reality of freedom cannot be objectified; to objectify it is to falsify it; but free-

dom, like all reality, is always actualized in particular objective acts. When Kant goes on to say, “It holds only as a necessary presupposition of reason in a being that believes itself to be conscious of a will ...”, we see what expanses of thought he denies himself by confining himself within the boundaries of his critical scheme. Had he allowed himself to move on to the metaphysical dimension he could have spoken of freedom not as a ‘presupposition of reason’ but as the reality that ‘a being that believes itself to be conscious of a will’ finds within itself shining in its own self-evidence.

Kant begins the Concluding Remark by saying, “The speculative use of reason *with respect to nature* leads to the absolute necessity of some supreme cause of the *world* ...” (AK 4:463), but is this not just what the *Critique of Pure Reason* admonished us to be on our guard against? But it seems that Kant here is simply permitting him-

self to speak loosely, for he then speaks of an ‘essential *limitation*’ through which reason cannot see “the *necessity* of what is and what happens ... unless a *condition* under which it is and happens ... is put at the basis of this”, a condition, by constant inquiry after which, “the satisfaction of reason is only further and further postponed.” I have here left out the parts relating to practical reason, in respect of which Kant concludes as follows: “And thus we do not indeed comprehend the practical unconditional necessity of the moral imperative, but we nevertheless comprehend its *incomprehensibility*; and this is all that can fairly be required of a philosophy that strives in its principles to the very boundary of human reason.” That would indeed be all we are permitted within the confines of speculative reason in Kant’s critical scheme; but a more daring approach gives us the vision of the moral life as the reality we know immediately and certainly.

**In maintaining that in the phenomenal sphere the law of causality reigns supreme Kant was right, but he was wrong when he took that to be more than an edict proclaimed by the human mind to serve its interest in manipulating the givennesses of the phenomenal world. Kant was wrong in being too timid, too shy, to declare that the noumenal world, far from being elusive, unknown, and unknowable, is the reality that we see immediately and most clearly, and if we dub it unknowable, that is only because we arbitrarily limit the application of the term knowledge to what is objectively given. Socrates created for himself needless difficulties by too lax use of the term *epistêmê*; Kant created for himself needless difficulties by conceding to the Empiricists their misappropriation of the terms knowledge and reality.**

**Kant is fond of final concepts and final principles. Kant shares the common error of philoso-**

phers who fail to see that there are no final or ultimate concepts or principles in philosophy or in human thought. A fundamental concept in philosophy seeks to represent an ultimate aspect of reality, a fundamental principle seeks to deal with an ultimate problem of reality, but the determinate concept, the articulate principle, cannot be ultimate or final. This is what Plato teaches us when he says that dialectic has always and constantly to destroy its own grounds.

*The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* is intended by Kant as “nothing more than the search for and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality*” (Preface, AK 4:392). But before we start any search for or attempt any establishment of principle, in the very first sentence, Kant gives expression to the insight that is and has for all time been at the heart of all morality, even if never before expressed in this same form. Here it is: “It is impossible to think of any-

**thing at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a good will” (AK 4:393). It is the untainted, unconstrained, free, spontaneous, creative expression of our inner reality that is the source of all good and that is the sole good — that is, if our inner reality is truly divine. This is the essence of the morality of the Buddha, of Socrates, of the Nazarene, of Spinoza. If you are good, the inner light of your reality will evince this insight. No proof is needed and no proof can be given, and Kant belabours himself needlessly and to no avail, and all he does is to display, develop, weave aspects and implications of his basic insight, just as Spinoza unfolds aspects and implications of his creative vision of reality as a single Substance, a rebirth of Parmenides’s One, except that Spinoza’s One is living, good, and intelligent.**

**In that opening sentence of the *Groundwork* we have the sum of Kant's moral philosophy, for the good will must be free, and to be free is not to be determined by any external force, and that is what it is to be autonomous, and for a rational being to be autonomous is to act under the direction of reason\*\*\*, to act on principle or, in Kant's phrasing, on one's representation of a law; and a rational being that knows that the supreme good is nothing but its free, autonomous will and that the intrinsic goodness of that free, autonomous will is an end in itself, and that as such it is such in every rational being, will see that any principle governing the action of such a will must govern the will of every rational being. That is what the Categorical Imperative comes to in the end. That is what every morality of autonomy comes to in essence. [Morality of heteronomy may or may not accept the fundamental values of the morality of autonomy, but to deal**

**with that question here is to stray far away from our present subject.]**

**Kant's moral principles – that the will of a rational being is the highest and unconditional good; that a human being ought always to use herself or himself and other human beings as an end and never merely as a means; that a human being ought always to act on a maxim that she or he could will to be a universal law – all of these principles lose nothing of their value if stated simply, prophetically, without proof or derivation from other principles or any attempt at justification, and they gain nothing from Kant's laboured proofs and derivations.**

**Plato said that poets least understand themselves and can least interpret their own work. (This is the gist of the *Ion*.) I would say rather that it is philosophers who least understand themselves and can least interpret their work.**

**Kant gives us an account of knowledge that does not ‘explain’ knowledge and does not discover the ‘truth’ about knowledge but that may help us face the mystery of knowledge, and then goes on to construct a dizzying theoretical system to prove it. Likewise, he gives us an account of an inspiring morality, then laboriously seeks to deduce it from theoretical premises and to justify it. Nietzsche may have been cruel but was not mistaken when he spoke of the “tartuffery, as stiff as it is virtuous, of old Kant as he lures us along the dialectical bypaths which lead, more correctly, mislead, to his ‘categorical imperative’ ...” (*Beyond Good and Evil*, I.5, tr. R. J. Hollingdale). Kant’s arguments would fully deserve Nietzsche’s taunt of “tartuffery”, except that Kant does it in good faith. He naively believes he is indeed making genuine deductions and derivations and giving demonstrations and proofs. Kant’s moral philosophy, with its peculiar emphasis on**

**the notion of duty, is the expression of the moral stance of a noble spirit dried and stiffened by a rigorous Pietistic upbringing. Because he does not believe that human nature is fundamentally good he finds it requisite to justify the necessity of being good.**

**Kant's categorical imperative demands that we do what we ought to do unconditionally. Socrates says that in doing good deeds we do what furthers the wellbeing of our souls. There may seem to be a contradiction between these two positions. But the contradiction is only formal, stemming from Kant's peremptory ruling that a moral act must have the form of unconditional duty, which gives it the appearance of irrationality. But then we also find that the Socratic wholesome soul is good in itself and for no other end, and Plato tells us in the *Timaeus* that God does the good because he is good, and in the *Republic* the Form of the Good, in being beyond**

*epistêmê* and beyond *ousia*, is in a sense beyond reason. This is the ultimate irrationality of all reality. When we reach the highest we can only stand and stare: at the end of the ascent in the *Symposium* we are presented with an oracular vision, not with a reasoned conclusion. Hence erudite scholars have no difficulty in finding fault with Kant's arguments, but in doing so they lose sight of his invaluable moral insights.

## NOTES

\*Since we can only apprehend the phenomenal world as outsiders, we see the event (in Whitehead's sense of the term) as a sequence of cause and effect. A voluntary act, at whatever level, seen from within, is an integral whole. Any separation, division, distinction drawn, is a conceptual artificiality that may be useful for theoretical purposes but necessarily involves falsification

**that can mislead and breed error. In all theory the seed of error is inherent.**

**\*\*Throughout my writings, in over two decades, I have been insisting that there can be no ground for admitting absolute causal necessity. ‘Laws of science’ are generalized descriptions of regularities in the processes of Nature. If Nature is constantly changing (indeed its very essence is constant change) then no state at moment  $t_2$  is an exact replica of a state at moment  $t_1$ . (the notion of ‘moment’ is a fiction.) All generalizations (‘scientific laws’) are approximate and are uncertain. The variations may be minute, not detectable by our most sophisticated precision instruments and Nature may oblige us by keeping ultra-conservative habits, but there is no exact repetitiveness in Nature. Else there could be no evolution in cosmic galaxies or in animal species. Lucretius had to make the dropping atoms swerve to account for change. Darwin’s muta-**

**tions were not errant aberrations but were of the order of Nature. Determinists buy the tinsel of causal necessity at the price of the gold of living experience.**

**\*\*\* In this meandering paragraph I have outstripped Kant's worst. I find it beyond repair. 'Reason' here has to be understood as the spontaneous overflow of creative intelligence.**

# REASONING IN KANT'S ETHICAL WORKS

## INTRODUCTORY

**Kant's moral philosophy is an amalgam of (1) his Pietistic upbringing, (2) insights of a morally wholesome personality, and (3) a needless adjunct of analyses and deductions that obfuscate the moral insight just as his laborious architectonic of analyses and deductions obscured the valuable insight in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I have previously written on Kant's moral philosophy (a) in "Free Will as Creativity" (included in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009), and (b) in Chapter Seven, "Kant", of *Quest of Reality***

**(2013). In this essay I will concentrate mainly on the futility of argument in Kant's two major ethical works. Scholars who concentrate on Kant's arguments, whether to expound or to criticize, waste their time and what is of more value than their time, they waste what is truly valuable in Kant's philosophy. In what follows I may seem to do what I blame those scholars for doing. Well, I do; but there is a difference. They – both admirers and detractors – examine the arguments and proofs to pronounce them good ones or bad ones; I pronounce them (good and bad alike) to be at best superfluous. I have said this before and will say it again: no original philosopher has ever reached her or his philosophical position inferentially. Argument, in the narrower sense of the word, is a surplus in philosophy. A philosopher argues in the first place to satisfy herself or himself, to clarify her or his basic notions, to assure themselves of the consistence of**

various elements in their thought, and to facilitate the exposition of their philosophy for the benefit of others. But argument can also hinder all that: it can distort and obscure the essential content of the philosophy, and never more so than in the case of Kant. In this essay I will examine (1) the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, which delineates Kant's fundamental moral insights, mainly to point out the superfluity of the theoretical argumentation, and (2) argument in the *Critique of Practical Reason* to show that it is extraneous to the substance of Kant's moral thought. In preparing this paper I have made use of my earlier writings on Kant's moral philosophy, but what follows is not a repetition or revision of those writings but is a fresh approach.

## **GROUNDWORK OF THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS (1785)**

*[All quotations in this section are from Mary Gregor's translation (1997) of the Groundwork and cite the pagination of the standard German edition of Kant's works, giving the volume number and page number preceded by the letters AK (for 'Akademie').]*

**Kant says that in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* he intends to “work out for once a pure moral philosophy, completely cleansed of everything that may be only empirical” (Preface, AK 4:389). To do that, obviously, we need to have immediate knowledge of what is moral, in other words, to have moral experience. Moral philosophy must start from the reality of moral experience. Before working out a pure moral philosophy Kant already had the essen-**

**tials of that moral philosophy\*. All the analyses, deductions, and constructions do not serve to discover moral principles but only to display those principles. All ethical theory, and indeed all theorizing in any sphere, is nothing but an extraneous dressing of original insight: it does not discover or reveal but only exhibits.**

**At the outset Kant introduces his concept of duty according to which for any action to be morally good “it is not enough that it *conform* with the moral law but it must also be done *for the sake of the law*” (Preface, AK 4:390). He had no need to find this concept by any analysis or any deduction; he brought it with him from the Pietistic edification of the Collegium Fridericianum where he spent more than eight years, from age eight till age sixteen. It is this principle that constricted and narrowed his moral theory. He also came to the task of establishing the principles of morality already armed with the insight**

**that nothing is “good without limitation except a good will” (AK 4:393), and the insight that humanity must always be regarded “as an end, never merely as a means” (AK 4:429). These insights are the true foundation of Kant’s moral philosophy, not the theoretical principles and maxims nor the concept of duty. Let me add: When Kant says that nothing is good absolutely but a good will and Socrates says that the only intrinsically good thing is a healthy soul, on the outside these seem to be different positions, but I see in them the same insight. We will see in what follows what Kant’s rationalizations of these principles and insights amount to.**

**Kant asserts that “because moral laws are to hold for every rational being as such” we have “to derive them from the universal concept of a rational being as such” (AK 4:412). In Chapter Seven of *Quest of Reality* I expressed disagreement with this view. I now see that, forgetting**

**about the supposed derivation from a universal concept, Kant's statement readily translates into the position of Socrates who saw that our whole worth and our particular excellence as human beings is in our rationality; to live under the guidance of reason makes our soul wholesome; to depart from reason harms the soul. Socrates had no need to derive this from any concept; for him the insight was the reality and shone in its own self-evidence.**

**Having enunciated the Categorical Imperative, Kant confesses: "Here, then, we see philosophy put in fact in a precarious position, which is to be firm even though there is nothing in heaven or on earth from which it depends or on which it is based" (AK 4:426). Indeed, there is nothing in heaven or on earth from which the principle could be derived. Nor could Socrates' principle that to suffer injustice is better than to commit injustice be derived from anything in heaven or**

**on earth. In the *Euthyphro* Socrates rejects off-hand the soothsayer's attempt to make piety dependent on what the gods approve of. (Albeit Plato at this point chooses to support the rejection with a logical argument.)**

**“So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (AK 4:429): Kant derives this ‘practical imperative’ from the principle that “rational nature exists as an end in itself”. No matter how many inferential steps we range between the principle and the imperative, in the end we have nothing but a circumlocution: a rational being is an end in itself; treat humanity as an end in itself.**

**At AK 4:430-431 Kant says that the principle of humanity as an end in itself is not borrowed from experience and must arise from pure rea-**

**son — from pure reason maybe, but not by reasoning. (See note at bottom on ‘reason and reasoning’.) The very idea of humanity has been very slow in gaining ground even among the most highly civilized peoples; it has been the creative gift of generous souls; it is still alien to large sectors of humankind and in yet larger sectors it receives lip service but is ignored in practice, else humankind would not be in the miserable state we are in.**

**That autonomy “is the ground of the dignity of human nature” is the principle of every genuine morality: it is of the essence of Socrates’ position which amounts to maintaining that a human being is truly human only when her or his action flows from the ideas and ideals created by the human mind; it is at the heart of Stoicism; it is the core of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, as it is the cornerstone of Kant’s morality. And how do we come by the idea of autonomy as the ground of morali-**

**ty? Not by reasoning but by insight into our inner reality.**

**When Kant defines a free person as “one whose actions are not determined by any external force, not even by his own desires”, are we not being given a mere tautology? The phrase “not even by his own desires” is added in compliance with the Categorical Imperative: a person may be motivated by her or his desires without injury to their morality but then the action would not be ‘moral’ according to Kant’s narrow definition.**

**When Kant speaks of the will as the causality of a rational being,\*\* he is unnecessarily making for confusion and creating theoretical difficulties for himself. ‘Causality’ in the natural world and ‘causality’ in the moral sphere have nothing in common but a misapplied word. Perhaps it would be better to say that a moral act does not**

have a cause but a reason. As Socrates explained in the *Phaedo*, his remaining put in prison awaiting execution cannot be explained by physical causes but only by his moral principles. Confusing these is a source of much vicious reasoning.

Kant's adherence to the causal determinism prevalent in his time confounds all his efforts to reconcile moral freedom with physical causality. He traps himself in an inescapable maze: "Hence freedom is only an *idea* of reason, the objective reality of which is in itself doubtful, whereas nature is a *concept of the understanding* that proves, and must necessarily prove, its reality in examples from experience" (AK 4:455). On these terms he wriggles in vain with abstruse and circuitous reasoning to escape his quandary. The "*idea* of reason" is its own reality, is what is really real, as Plato would say, while the "*concept of the understanding*" as applied to the phenomenal world is something we take on faith without ra-

**tional justification, as Hume discovered. I am here reversing Kant's use of the term 'faith': he assigns it to the moral sphere, I, following Plato, to the empirical.**

**Kant is wiser than he knows when he says that "reason would overstep all its bounds if it took it upon itself to *explain how* pure reason can be practical, which would be exactly the same task as to explain *how freedom is possible*" (AK 4:458/459). Indeed, reason cannot explain freedom; no reality can be or has to be explained,\*\*\* and freedom is the reality of our creative intelligence which is our reality and all the reality we know. "For we can explain nothing but what we can reduce to laws the object of which can be given in some possible experience" (AK 4:459). This is 'explanation' as understood in empirical science. Modern scientists and philosophers have not grasped the deeper significance hidden within this statement. Scientific 'explanation' does**

**not give us understanding but an expedient tool. Only philosophy, in exploring the mysteries of reality, gives us true understanding in the sense of immediate awareness of the self-evidence of what is real, which we may call ‘insight’. If what I say sounds enigmatic it is because we are too much under the sway of the presuppositions that both Rationalism and Empiricism have enveloped us in, rendering us incapable of looking within to behold our inner reality. Kant’s ‘Copernican revolution’ was incomplete; he himself continued to see the outer world as real while he reduced the inner world to mere ideas or at best Ideas of Pure Reason; later philosophers reduced it to a *‘deus ex machina’* or at best to a negligible epiphenomenon. I will say it bluntly: of all philosophers only Socrates-Plato knew where to look for reality. The mystics knew, and maybe Gautama the Buddha and the philosophers of India. The West has been blinded by the success-**

es of science, and lest my reference to the West be misinterpreted I add: where I live we are sunk in the mire of stark ignorance.

I will not here discuss Kant's desperate attempts in the Concluding Remark to escape with his religious beliefs, attempting to break through the impenetrable walls of his transcendental edifice. Kant intended the *Groundwork* as "nothing more than the search for and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality*" (AK 4:392). He could have saved himself the trouble, for at the very beginning we have the insight behind all that he laboured to search for and establish. It reads: "It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a good will" (AK 4:393). From this unfolds all the rest as a plant unfolds from the seed.

## **CRITIQUE OF PRACTICAL REASON (1787)**

*[All quotations in this section are in T. K. Abbott's translation, 1996, and the page numbers refer to that edition.]*

**In the Preface to the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant presents the notion of freedom in his convoluted style. We are told that transcendental freedom, freedom in the absolute sense, is required by speculative reason “in its use of the concept of causality in order to escape the antinomy into which it inevitably falls, when in the chain of cause and effect it tries to think the *unconditioned*” (p. 13). Underneath this knotted statement lies the simple insight that our mind, in its theoretical capacity, finding that the chain of cause and effect, followed objectively, extends to infinity, demands that the endlessly conditioned be rooted in the unconditioned and finds**

**that only the idea of spontaneous free activity can render any becoming intelligible. If my statement sounds as convoluted as Kant's don't blame me but him. We are immediately aware of our freedom in the spontaneity of our moral and our creative activity. To try to rationalize our immediate and indubitable sense of freedom we have to clothe it in theoretical vestment. Those who feel that they need to verify or prove their freedom are deluded by the unjustified supposition of causal determinism which is no more than a useful scientific fiction which science can never prove to be absolute. (I have to go out of my way to affirm what I have explained repeatedly before, that confusing spontaneous creative freedom with choice vitiates modern thinking on the problem.)**

**In Kant's transcendental philosophy our knowledge of the natural world is confined to the surface of phenomena behind which or under-**

**neath which we suppose there must be something real (the noumenon) ,\*\*\*\* but we can by no means validate this supposition empirically. It is in the moral act that we have our only communion with the noumenon and only there do we meet with – rather, do we have experience of – genuine causality, if ‘causality’ is the word. (Etymologically ‘noumenon’ is simply what is thought, so obviously it cannot be found outside the mind, but, since Kant, it has come to mean the inner (or underlying) reality of things as opposed to their phenomenal appearances.)**

**Kant goes wrong in trying to establish the reality of freedom apodictically. He says he is only establishing the possibility of the concept. To the Empiricists this is as nothing for they only acknowledge what can be established empirically. As for idealists who maintain that ideas are all that is real, what need have they for establishing the possibility of the concept when to do that**

**we must already have the concept? Plato nowhere tried to establish by argument either the necessity or the possibility or the reality of the soul or of the Forms or of the Idea of the Good, for it is in these that we ourselves attain reality and know reality.**

**Reality, the reality that has its being and its home in the mind and nowhere but in the mind, shines in its own self-evidence. To theorize about such reality can only be useful if it leads us to probe and explore our own inner reality; otherwise all such theorization is inane.**

**Kant distinguishes three ‘Ideas of Pure Reason’: God, Freedom, and Immortality. These terms are ambiguous. If we take God to mean the unconditioned condition of all that is, Freedom to mean the spontaneity of creative intelligence, and Immortality to mean the supra-temporality of the soul or mind, then these are**

**creative ideals that confer intelligibility and worth on our life and our world — ideas and ideals that make the experienced world meaningful and real for us but do not actually exist in the world outside us. But Kant is untrue to his own transcendental system when he tries to find moral ground for affirming the actuality of these ideals in the world outside us.**

**Kant tries to resolve the incompatibility of causal determinism with moral freedom by distinguishing between the phenomenal subject and the noumenal subject. The phenomenal subject is part of nature and is subject to natural law; the noumenal subject is autonomous and free and is subject to the moral law. This enunciation fails to resolve the incompatibility: as long as we suppose causal determinism to be absolute, moral freedom must be seen as a delusion, just as belief in an omnipotent and omniscient personal God makes of free will a mockery. But we are imme-**

**diately and indubitably aware of our creative freedom; it is causal determinism that lacks evidence and must only be taken as a working hypothesis admitting approximation and uncertainty.**

**Problem I in the Analytic reads: “Supposing that the mere legislative form of maxims is alone the sufficient determining principle of a will, to find the nature of the will which can be determined by it alone” (p.43). Kant ‘finds’ that “such a will must be conceived as quite independent on the natural law of phenomena in their mutual relation, namely, the law of causality; such independence is called *freedom* in the strictest, that is in the transcendental sense; consequently, a will which can have its law in nothing but the mere legislative form of the maxim is a free will” (p. 43). Who will take this for proper deduction or reasoning? The circuitous wording of the ‘problem’ cannot hide that it is asking about the na-**

**ture of a will that freely conforms to a maxim. The idea of freedom is implanted in the ‘problem’.**

**The idea of the Categorical Imperative, which stems from Kant’s Pietistic upbringing is the source of his equating of freedom, the quintessence of morality, with conformity to law, which can only agree with autonomy if it means to follow one’s own law. But Kant in making the Categorical Imperative the all in all of morality narrows morality unnecessarily and depletes the concept of freedom. I have formerly defended Kant’s contention that only acts done out of duty are moral, on the ground that that is the logical consequence of his definition of morality which does not deny the worth of acts done out of other good motives. Already in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* we find him affirming that “there are many souls so sympathetically attuned that, without any other motive of vanity or self-**

**interest they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy around them and can take delight in the satisfaction of others” (AK 4:398). Yet in obedience to his own constricted definition of ‘moral’ he is forced to assert that such action is of no moral worth. I am for a wider conception of morality and freedom. A poet spontaneously pouring her or his joy or grief in song is free and morally good. A mother suckling her baby may do it instinctively but if she does it with love her act is free and morally good. It would of course be unfair and unreasonable to think that Kant’s narrow theoretical conception of morality reflects on his personality: a person who throughout his whole life was devoted to science and philosophy, who could speak of “souls so sympathetically attuned that ... they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy around them”, whose mind was filled with awe and wonder by the starry heavens above him and the moral sense within**

him, such a person must have been of a generous and kind nature, must have been a beautiful soul. Those who pour scorn on his austere ‘deontology’ (a term for which Kant is not responsible) should remember this.

Kant needlessly embroils himself in theoretical conundrums. Having asserted that what gives actions moral worth is “*that the moral law should directly determine the will*”, he goes on to say that “as to the question how a law can be directly and of itself a determining principle of the will (which is the essence of morality), this is, for human reason, an insoluble problem and identical with the question: how a free will is possible” (pp. 92-93). Why couldn’t Kant rest content with the self-evidence of an idea? For Socrates the self-evidence of the idea is the final goal of reasoning. For Plato the idea is the reality and the mystery. No theorizing and no reasoning can go beyond the reality and the mystery affirmed in

**Socrates' statement: It is by Beauty that all that is beautiful is beautiful.**

**Kant's response to the conflict between causal determinism and freedom of the will is to see causality as the law of the phenomenal and freedom as the law of the noumenal. This solution will not satisfy anyone who takes causality as an ultimate principle. Only when we dethrone causality and see it as a working fiction can we find it consistent with the freedom of the noumenal. We know spontaneous creativity immediately but know causality only as an inductive hypothesis. But in Kant's time both Rationalists and Empiricists believed implicitly in the universality of the causal principle. We must give credit to Kant for refusing to throw freedom overboard. He characterizes this position as faith. (Hume was right in asserting that there is no rational justification for the notion of causality, but was wrong when he stopped at debunking the princi-**

**ple of causality. Kant, to rescue science, affirmed that causality is imposed by the mind on nature.)**

**For Kant (1) the existence of God, (2) freedom of the will, and (3) the immortality of the soul, are three Postulates of Practical Reason. But Kant, flouting his own transcendental system, labours to show that on moral grounds we are justified in accepting the existence of God and immortality as actual. He could not discard the doctrines inculcated in him in his childhood. In my view the idea of God as the unity of all being under the Principle of Integrity and Wholeness, the idea of immortality as the supra-temporality of the soul, and the idea of freedom as creativity, are realities in the Platonic sense, are ideas that confer intelligibility and value on our life and our world: that is their whole reality, a reality in and for the mind, a metaphysical reality which we err when we transform into actualities. Even freedom, the only reality of which we are imme-**

**diately aware, cannot reasonably be projected into the world outside us. Kant's arguments for the validity of these Postulates prove nothing and serve no purpose. They are, to say the least, redundant.**

**NOTE: In this paper I have been using 'reason' and 'reasoning' almost as opposites. Some explanation is due. (A) By 'reason' I mean what Plato sometimes calls *phronêsis* and what elsewhere I prefer to call 'intelligence' in a special sense of the term. Reason is reflection, is the mind probing the mind, is the ground and fount of rationality. Reason is the native thirst of the mind for intelligibility, for understanding. (B) Reasoning is argument in the narrower sense of 'argument' – involving inference, proof, demonstration – and it is not one uniform thing: reasoning in mathematics is other than reasoning in**

**inductive science and this is other than reasoning in a law suit or in political debate. Reasoning always has limits defined by its subject-matter and the method proper to that particular subject-matter; breaching those limits leads to gross error. In philosophy, while reason is the all in all of philosophizing, reasoning is peripheral and only has incidental use: to elucidate, to facilitate exposition, to examine one's own thought for clearing inconsistencies, contradictions and obscurities. Philosophers, mistakenly thinking that reasoning has the same role in philosophy as in mathematics and science, have done grave damage to philosophy.**

**The concept of 'experience' also is ambiguous and the ambiguity can cause confusion and error. Thus while it is true to say that morality is not derived from experience, meaning that it is not based on factual or pragmatic considerations, it is also true to say that morality is, and**

**can only be, derived from moral experience, from the spiritual experience of rational human beings.**

**Cairo, 24 February 2015.**

### **ADDITIONAL NOTES**

**\*Just as no one has to study Logic to think logically, no one needs moral theory (Ethics) to behave morally. Moral maxims and injunctions do not teach morality but clarify what – amid the complications and confusions of practical living – agrees or does not agree with indigenous morality.**

**\*\*See the first additional Note appended to the second paper above. Causation, as Kant following Hume saw (albeit dimly), is a fiction, a useful fiction for science. Philosophically we have to say that there is no ‘causation’ (A causing B) in Na-**

**ture any more than in moral activity: there is only intelligent creativity; the event (natural process or moral act) is an integral whole, not in time but in duration. It is only when duration is conceptually represented as temporal succession that the integral event is seen as cause followed by effect.**

**\*\*\*To explain is to adduce some extraneous ground, but a reality is its own ground.**

**\*\*\*\*The fleeting shadows of the physical world cannot exist by themselves, in themselves, we have to suppose either that they have a throbbing noumenal heart or to say with Berkeley that all nature exists in the mind of God and only in the mind of God. As all language is essentially metaphorical, these two versions really say the same thing: any controversy between their respective advocates re-enacts the theological tragicomedy of the iota that split the Church.**

# KANT ON METAPHYSICS

## INTRODUCTION

**I have repeatedly said that Kant only went half-way towards re-discovering the Socratic-Platonic insight into the true nature of philosophical thinking. For that halfway motion he rightly deserves to be considered the most original and most important of modern philosophers.**

**In the century falling between the publication of Descartes' *Discours de la methode* and the publication of Hume's *Essay Concerning Human Nature* philosophy divided into two opposed camps. The Rationalists – Descartes, Leibniz,**

**Spinoza, Wolff – confidently reasoned on the world, God, immortality, freedom, and while they all presented well-reasoned arguments, they did not agree among themselves. The Empiricists on the other hand, thought that things seen and touched and capable of being measured and weighed are all the reality there is; they limited knowledge to two classes: mathematics and the outcome of observation and experimentation. Locke surveyed the contents of the mind, leaving out the mind. Hume, starting from the position of Locke, reached two devastating conclusions: (1) We have no justification for assuming any connection between successive events; as Wittgenstein was to put it two centuries later, the causal nexus is superstition. (2) Moral judgment cannot be grounded on objective, empirical facts. The Rationalists had no cogent answer to Hume's sceptical conclusions.**

**Kant presumably read Hume's shorter book, *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, when the German translation was published in 1755. Kant famously said that Hume awoke him from his dogmatic slumber; he must have meant the Rationalist dogmatism in which he was schooled. We can reasonably assume that his mind had already been busied with the problem, but Hume's work gave him the decisive nudge; it prodded him to question the justification of rationalist metaphysical thinking.**

**At the time it was generally agreed that judgments (propositions) fall into two classes: (1) Analytic, formal, propositions, including mathematical propositions; these are always *a priori*. (2) Synthetic, substantial, propositions; these are always *a posteriori*. This was accepted by both Rationalists and Empiricists. But metaphysical propositions are not analytic and they also cannot be empirically verified. Hume therefore fa-**

mously concluded that they are to be committed to the flames. Kant had a creative solution. There is, there must be, a third class of judgments (propositions), synthetic *a priori* judgments. He found that mathematical propositions are not analytic, as was commonly assumed, but are synthetic *a priori*.  $7+5=12$  is not analytic. Plato had said that more than two millennia earlier. This gave Kant the crucial question which was the foundation of the whole of his critical system: How are synthetic *a priori* propositions possible?

In philosophy an original thinker poses a question. The question is her or his true contribution to philosophical thinking. A philosophical question can have no definitive answer. It is the gift of the philosopher to generations of philosophers to puzzle out and answer in their several ways. Plato asked: How is it that there can be knowledge at all? In answer he gave us the myth of *anamnêsis*. The question remained, facing us

**with the ultimate reality of intelligence in us, the ultimate mystery of the mind: that we have a mind — or as I would put it, that we are a mind, that our reality is our creative intelligence.**

**In posing the question, Kant already had the form of the answer: We can and do create metaphysical notions and metaphysical propositions. The answer to Hume’s denial of the causal nexus is that the causal nexus is a creation of the mind to confer sense on the senseless flow of appearances. Kant saw that and affirmed that “in order to know something securely *a priori*” we have “to ascribe to the thing nothing” except what follows necessarily from what we ourselves “had put into it in accordance with its concept.” (*Critique*, B xi.) The gist of his ‘Copernican revolution’ was to assume that “objects must conform to our cognition” rather than assuming that “all our cognition must conform to objects” as was commonly held. That was all the sum and substance**

of his transcendental system, a re-discovery of what Socrates had clearly affirmed in the ‘autobiographical’ passage of the *Phaedo*. But Kant could not believe himself; he was too learned to be satisfied with such a simple solution. He went on to house his creative insight within castles and fortifications of analyses and deductions and syntheses.

The *Critique of Pure Reason*, first edition, was published in 1781. It fell on deaf ears. Even accomplished philosophers found it incomprehensible, unintelligible, or quite unreadable. He began working on a book supposedly presenting the ideas of the *Critique* in a more accessible form and in 1783 published the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. In 1787 he published the second edition of the *Critique* in which he tempered the expression of some of the more ‘shocking’ ideas and included some elucidatory

material that had first appeared in the *Prolegomena*.

The difficulty of Kant's critical works stems from his trying, let us say, to explicate what should be self-evident. Kant penetrated the difficulties that lay at the basis of the seemingly irresolvable controversy between Empiricism and Rationalism and reached important insights. He could have presented those insights plainly as creative notions. But he was too learned and his age was too learned for such a simple approach. He elaborated the imposing architectonic of the *Critique* to justify, to deduce, to prove, those insights. The analyses, proofs, and deductions only obscured the valuable insights. Kant's attempts at justification and proof only embroil the insight in layers upon layers of impenetrable outer barricades.\*1) In the *Prolegomena* he meant to offer a less complicated approach, but he did not

**succeed in overcoming or avoiding the basic fault of his method.**

**In the following running commentary on the *Prolegomena* I try to do three things: (1) to present those valuable insights; (2) to show the futility of the formal superstructure; (3) to show where Kant still fell short of the Socratic-Platonic insight.**

*I am using the electronic version of the Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy edition of Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, translated and edited by Gary Hatfield, revised edition. All quotations below are from that edition and cite the volume and page numbers of the standard German edition of the complete works of Kant.*

## ***PROLEGOMENA TO ANY FUTURE METAPHYSICS***

**I might say at the outset that, in my opinion, Kant did not have a metaphysical philosophy, but had a ‘philosophy of metaphysics’, a critique of metaphysics.**

**In the Preface Kant proposes to pose the question “whether such a thing as metaphysics is even possible at all”. He asks: “If metaphysics is a science, why is it that it cannot, as other sciences, attain universal and lasting acclaim?” (4:255) This is the question for which modern philosophers have had no answer and will continue to have no answer so long as they delude themselves into thinking that they have to, and can, arrive at either factual knowledge or mathematical certainty. Kant himself did not completely free himself from this delusive presumption. Hence he could not have a fully satisfactory an-**

**swer to the question about the possibility of metaphysics. This comes out clearly when he asserts that there is as yet no metaphysics at all, thus wiping out all the profound and rich contributions of philosophers, ancient and modern. To regain that thrown away treasure we need only to radically revise our conception of the nature of philosophical (metaphysical) thinking.**

**Kant makes use of the metaphor of reason generating a concept in her womb (4:257). This one phrase contains the answer to Hume and the whole substance of Kant's transcendental system. Locke created a practical problem by leaving the mind out of account, making the 'ideas' impress themselves onto an inert *tabula rasa*. Hume defined the problem. Kant found the answer in restoring the mind to its rightful place and role. The question how that is possible is unanswerable since the creativity of the mind, of which we are immediately aware, is a reality and**

**like all reality is a mystery that will always remain a mystery. The true philosophical answer is the Socratic answer: to acknowledge our ignorance.\*2) Kant's efforts at answering the unanswerable question resulted in an imposing edifice that baffled Kant's most intelligent contemporaries and that earned him Nietzsche's sardonic ridicule. Our learned scholars vaunt their mastery of the intricacies of Kant's tortuous analyses and deductions but fail to penetrate to the living core. For even in the 'simplified' *Prolegomena* the core is hidden under the excessive padding.**

**Kant tried to present Hume's problem in a general manner, we might say to extract the form of the problem, and "soon found that the concept of the connection of cause and effect is far from being the only concept through which the understanding thinks connections of things *a priori*; rather, metaphysics consists wholly of such concepts" (4:260). This was the pregnant**

**insight, this was all that was needed to rescue metaphysical thinking. But Kant, instead of presenting it affirmatively as an insight, went on first to “ascertain their number ... from a single principle” and then “proceeded to the deduction of these concepts” to assure himself “that they were not, as *Hume* had feared, derived from experience, but had arisen from the pure understanding” (4:260) This was where Kant went astray. In the first place the metaphysical concepts cannot be numbered, for the metaphysical mind is ever creative, and in the second place we have no need for the assurance that these concepts are not derived from experience since the insight that these concepts are bred by the mind stands on its own self-evidence. Plato nowhere tries to prove the reality of the intelligible realm or of the forms that have their home in the intelligible realm. Kant’s elaborate superstructures had the sorry result that they obfuscated his val-**

**uable insight so that philosophers from his day to this day have been oblivious of it.**

**Kant convinced himself that he had determined “completely and according to universal principles, the entire extent of pure reason with regard to its boundaries as well as its content”, making it possible for metaphysics “to build its system according to a sure plan” (5:261). What made it easier for him so to deceive himself was that he was principally concerned with the lower reaches of reason, what Plato designated in the ‘divided line’ as *dianoia*, applying the intelligible forms to perceptible things to lend them intelligibility. Although Kant’s religious convictions and his Rationalist background would not permit him to leave out the higher reaches of pure reason, the Ideals of Pure Reason could only have an uneasy footing in the Transcendental System.\*3)**

**Kant was right in maintaining, against both Rationalists and Empiricists, that mathematical judgments are synthetic. Indeed this may have been what led him to his original notion of synthetic *a priori* judgments as the metaphysical judgments *par excellence*. But when he suggests that this had escaped all philosophers before him, he ignores that Plato's metaphysical vision had this insight for its foundation.\*4)**

**Kant finds fault with those dogmatic philosophers who “always sought the sources of metaphysical judgments only in metaphysics itself, and not outside it in the pure laws of reason in general” (4:270). Metaphysical ‘judgments’ (a glaringly inappropriate term), being creative, can have no source and no ground but their intrinsic meaningfulness, their own self-evidence. The “pure laws of reason in general” are nothing but an extraneous artificial structure fitted onto the intrinsic meaningfulness. Such is logical the-**

**ory: it is an artificial representation of the intelligibility of wholesome thought. The principle of sufficient reason itself is nothing but the mind's demand for intelligibility, or let us say, an expression of the inevitability of intelligence being true to itself. No wonder that the dogmatic metaphysicians of Kant's time and later metaphysicians found Kant merely confusing. He did not give them what they really needed, the realization that their metaphysical creations were just that, creations of their own that have all their reality only in them and for them, that they were not truths\*5) but myths, yet divine myths that constitute our spiritual life, and that when their mythicity is revealed, when their intrinsic contradictoriness is shown, they are not lost, but then, and only then, have the power of freeing our soul from idolatry and bondage to false beliefs and false values. Kant could not give them**

that because he himself fell short of the full Platonic insight.

Kant heads §5 with the question: “How is cognition from pure reason possible?” This is the kind of inquiry that led Moore and Wittgenstein into endless mazes of fruitless questioning since it asks for justification of a self-evident reality. Cognition “from pure reason” is possible because it is the nature and function of pure reason to reason, or as Plato would have it, to give birth to *alêtheua*. This is one aspect of the problem of knowledge which can be formulated either as: ‘What is knowledge?’ or ‘How is knowledge possible?’ and there is one answer to both formulations of the problem: Knowledge is knowledge; it is an ultimate reality; it is a mystery. (‘Cognition’ is Professor Hatfield’s rendering of ‘*Erkenntnis*’ which is usually translated as ‘knowledge’. Throughout this paper I use ‘cognition’ and ‘knowledge’ indifferently.)

**Kant was right in insisting that metaphysicians should “acknowledge that it is not allowed them even once *to guess*, let alone to *know*, something about that which lies beyond the boundaries of all possible experience” (4:278).\*6) He was right to that extent and the metaphysicians of his time and metaphysicians since his time would have been wise to heed his admonition. But he curtailed the rightful domain of pure reason when he stopped at that. Plato knew and emphatically affirmed that philosophers have no business with actual existence, neither beyond nor within, the boundaries of experience, but he opened to them the whole heavens of metaphysical reality. Kant again goes wrong when he allows metaphysicians to “*assume* something” beyond the boundaries of experience “solely for practical use” (4:278). That was the licence he gave himself, contravening his own transcendental system.**

**In §6 Kant seeks to answer the question: ‘How is pure mathematics possible?’ Mathematics, apodictic, pure, and *a priori*, he finds, must “presuppose some *a priori* basis for cognition” (4:280). Yes, but that something is not something we have to go out looking for. The mind is the home and the fount of all intelligibility. The mind, creative intelligence, breeds intelligibility. We don’t have to seek its basis outside of itself for that basis is not “deeply hidden” but is the reality best known to us; that is what Kant sees as its “present(ing) its concept beforehand in *intuition*” — “an “intuition that is not empirical but pure” (4:281). What sense is there in seeking to prove or to deduce the possibility of that of which we have the *intuition* beforehand, whose “judgments are always *intuitive*? (Even in Kant’s special sense of ‘intuition’)**

**Yet it was unfortunate that Kant took mathematics and theoretical science for his models (ra-**

ther, as the whole content) of metaphysical cognition. Mathematics, like theoretical science, is a formal system that can be applied to objective phenomena to yield factual (always approximate and uncertain) knowledge. That is how Kant can contrast these formal systems with “philosophy ... content(ing) itself with *discursive* judgments *from mere concepts*” (4:281). That is how dogmatic metaphysics presents its visions, presuming to give a reasoned account of things as they are. And that is how Kant had to limit the jurisdiction of pure reason to the two fields of mathematics and natural science. Genuine metaphysical pronouncements are not “*discursive* judgments *from mere concepts*” but are oracular intimations of the realities that Kant limits to the Ideals of Pure Reason: genuine metaphysics offers visions, say dreams, of God, of the All, of the Soul, of Eternity, that are confessed dreams, but

**dreams that infuse our life and our world with meaning and with value.**

**We are told that the “first and highest condition” of the possibility is that “it must be grounded in some *pure intuition* or other, in which it can present, or, as one calls it, *construct* all of its concepts *in concreto yet a priori*” (4:281). To my mind, this is a round-about way of saying that pure reason creates its fertile notions. We see that, we acknowledge that, and that’s that. We have proved nothing, we have deduced nothing, for there was nothing to prove or deduce; there was only a reality within us to be proclaimed. Kant proclaimed it but clothed his proclamation in intricate redundant proofs and analyses and deductions. Philosophers in his time and beyond his time cleverly saw that his reasoning proved nothing and overlooked the reality within that needed no proving.**

**Kant sees clearly that “empirical intuition” is to be admitted without proof, but does not see this in respect of metaphysical intuition because he lacks the notion of metaphysical reality. Despite his Rationalist background he is still in the clutches of the Empiricist conception of ‘reality’ as that, and only that, which can be presented objectively. The Platonic notion of metaphysical reality\*7), the reality of the intelligible, is still foreign to our philosophers, even to Whitehead for whom it was evident in *Religion in the Making* but completely absent in *Process and Reality*.**

**Having questioned what is immediately evident, it was inevitable that Kant should create more difficulties for himself. So (at the beginning of §8) he transforms the question into “*How is it possible to intuit something a priori?*” Plato knew that “When the soul (mind) all by itself reflects, it moves into that which is pure ... then it rests from wandering ... and it is this state that is**

called *phronêsis*” (*Phaedo*, 79d). That is self-evident reality. We may say, again in Platonic terms, that pure reason engenders *alêtheia* (reality). Kant continues his needless wandering when he says: “An intuition is a representation of the sort which would depend immediately on the presence of an object” (4:281). Intuition (in Kant’s sense or as philosophical insight) is its own content, its own testimony. The term ‘object’ in Kant’s sentence is misleading.

When in §9 Kant speaks of “things *as they are in themselves*” he is not referring to noumena but to things as they are for us in the natural world. Thus he says that their intuition “would always be empirical”, which clearly leaves out metaphysical reality. That is the detrimental defect of Kant’s system: It leaves out what is really real and hence cannot have room for metaphysics properly understood.

**Kant ‘explains’ how it is possible for our intuition “to precede the actuality of the object and occur as an *a priori* cognition” by saying that that is possible only “*if it contains nothing else except the form of sensibility, which in me as subject precedes all actual impressions through which I am affected by objects*” (4:282). That comes down to saying that the mind has a power, call it ‘sensibility’, that moulds things to forms projected by the mind. Plato could have thought of that formulation in his many experimentations for representing the relation between the forms and their exemplifications, and it would have added nothing to the simple view that forms bred in the mind and by the mind confer on things their meaning and their relations. That “the objects of the senses can be intuited only in accordance with this form of sensibility” means simply that the mind subjects things to its forms, and we can know it *a priori* because we know it, because, I**

**will not say because we know our mind, but because we are our mind, our mind is our reality and has intrinsic self-evidence; if we find that difficult to swallow, it is because our minds have been dimmed and clouded by false ideas and false beliefs.**

**That “intuitions which are possible *a priori* can never relate to things other than objects of our senses” (4:282) is a half-truth because Kant has limited beforehand the scope of intuition, and even the half that is true has been so obscured by Kant’s needless abstruse constructions that it continued and continues to be ignored by both philosophers and scientists to the great harm of both philosophy and science.**

**Kant insists that mathematics must ‘construct’ its objects and that mathematics cannot be analytical but can only be synthetic. I say that the mind creates its ideas; this should be easier to**

**grasp than the metaphor of mathematics constructing its object. But it seems that recent and contemporary philosophers, with their outward-looking frame of mind, still prefer to see mathematics as analytical. Of course it is analytical by consequence; once the mind has bred the mathematical system, and as it is born endowed with its intrinsic intelligibility, it is possible to see it analytically, as even an organic body can be described reductively as made up of distinct parts. In the same way Kant's view of space and time as 'modes of the understanding' is difficult for Empiricists to grasp. I find it easier to explain in the case of time: for surely a moment's reflection should convince us that there can be no observed succession in nature; the very notion of succession is a 'construct'. Hume, concentrating on the deliverances of sensation, could only see distinct, disparate moments that cannot even be said to follow one another, for that already involves the**

**notion of time. But, as Bergson and Whitehead saw, we know duration in our living experience and that is the model or the mode of time (to use Kant's term).**

**Kant says that “arithmetic forms its concepts of numbers through successive addition of units in time” (4:283). I suppose that only comes at a late stage. I suppose that numbers were first conceived as distinct configurations: the configuration two, the configuration three, and so on. The concept of unity (‘one’) must have been a later derivative.**

**In §11 Kant summarizes and defends his solution of the problem of pure mathematics. “Pure mathematics, as synthetic cognition *a priori*, is possible only because it refers to no other objects than mere objects of the senses ... this pure intuition is nothing but the mere form of sensibility ...” (4:283-4). Would it not be simpler to say**

**that sensation (perception, rather) is not passive receptivity but it actively moulds the deliverances of sense in forms engendered by the mind? The problem that Kant labours to solve is a pseudo-problem generated by Locke's reduction of creativity to passive reception by — there's the problem, reception by no recipient!**

**I don't understand why Kant has to go to such lengths to prove that we only know the appearances of things. Even Whitehead's Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness can only help us know things in their apparent concreteness; it does not enable us to penetrate to the active core of things.**

**To speak of the objective validity of mathematics is misleading; it can lead and has led to gross error. The term objective here is ambiguous. (Kant of course has his special sense for the term.) Mathematics as a system of pure thought**

**is intrinsically certain ('objective' in Kant's sense) but when mathematics is applied to actual things it is tainted with approximation, since actual things are never 'true to form'.**

**Kant's arguments for the possibility of natural science are of the selfsame nature as those for the possibility of mathematics. Having commented on that at length and after my comments on the Preface I don't think there is need to add much here, especially as I have amply dealt with these questions in other papers in this volume\*8).**

**'Experience' is a word that should be approached with caution. The content of experience is always given. That may be called objective experience. But living experience is the active, creative interpretation, rather re-creation, of the content. Once we see that clearly, we see that all of Kant's elaborations are worse than useless.**

**Section 22 begins: “To sum this up: the business of the senses is to intuit; that of the understanding, to think.” But even sensation conveys nothing to us without the garb of intelligible form. As Kant himself says in the *Critique*: “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” (xiv).**

**All of Kant’s “long-winded pedantic pomp” (his own phrase, 4:314) to show that synthetic *a priori* judgments relate only to possible experience and not to things in themselves boils down to Socrates’ simple separation of investigation *en tois ergois* from investigation *en tois logois*. Investigating things in nature, albeit by the application of intelligible forms, yields only reports about the appearances of things, but can never reveal the essence of things or the active power within things. Mathematics and ‘pure natural science’, as systems of thought, have self-evidence (are *a priori*) but when applied to actual**

**things neither do they take us to the heart of things nor are they absolutely certain or perfectly precise: the absolute certainty and precision adduced by scientists to the principles of mathematics and science in actual application is the superstition of determinism that confounded Kant's treatment of freedom.**

**In §32 Kant grossly misunderstands Plato's position and in referring to "an as yet uncultivated age" (4:314) he is completely off the mark for the view he is faulting was not that of an "uncultivated age" but of the finest philosophical mind of all ages. But I will not stop to correct Kant's error for it is the selfsame error I have been countering in all my writings.**

**In §33 the ambiguity of the term 'noumenon' makes Kant draw the wrong conclusion from a true premise. In speaking of a thing in itself (noumenon) Kant mainly thinks of the supposed**

**substance or substratum at the bottom of a thing. This can be nothing but an unverifiable assumption. But we know of one noumenon that is truly in itself and for itself, and that is our own mind or soul. Now “our concepts of substance, of force, of action, of reality, etc.” which are as Kant says “wholly independent of experience” (4:315) are originally borrowed from the substantiality, the power, the activity, the reality of the mind. When they are applied to the phenomena they are metaphors to lend phenomena what only true noumena can give. For of phenomena we know nothing other than what we ourselves put into them as Kant has rightly said.**

**In §36, in the course of giving his answer to the question: “How is nature itself possible?” Kant gives the gist of his transcendental system in a few words hidden under heaps of unnecessary argumentation. Here are the significant words: “... we are not acquainted with nature except as**

**the sum total of appearances ... we cannot get the laws of their connection from anywhere else except ... from the conditions of necessary unification in one consciousness ... the highest legislation for nature must lie in our self, i.e., in our understanding ...” (4:319). The rest is junk. Astute thinkers have failed to see the genuine insight beneath the clutter.**

**Kant makes too much of the distinction between the sensibility and the understanding. Our living conscious experience is active creative intelligence. In theorizing we draw distinctions by creating abstractions that can be useful but can also be harmful when taken as final. All of Kant’s elaborate tables are such: abstractions, fictions, that may help but may also hamper and lead astray.**

**When Kant speaks of the possibility of metaphysics he has in mind of course his truncated**

**and emaciated conception of metaphysics. What is most important in metaphysics, metaphysics proper, is what the transcendental system has no room for. Kant's system can at best be designated as a lame epistemology, lame because it deals with knowledge leaving out the reality that the knowledge is knowledge of. In considering Kant's metaphysics the most important part is to see how he wrings the neck of his own critical system to express views on metaphysical questions that his system rules should not be approached by pure reason.**

**Kant says of natural science that "despite all its certainty it can never rival mathematics" (4:327). Mathematics has certainty because mathematics is a completely self-enclosed system of abstractions. The 'laws' of science are not purely conceptual as Kant suggests. They are models of the regularities of nature that are always approximations and that can never be ab-**

**solutely certain. I have dwelt on this sufficiently elsewhere and will not amplify on it here.**

**In §40 Kant speaks of metaphysics being “further concerned with pure concepts of reason that are never given in any possible experience ... and with assertions whose truth or falsity cannot be confirmed or exposed by any experience; and this part of metaphysics is moreover precisely that which forms its essential end ...” (3:327). This is the prohibited fruit that Kant is forbidden to taste but that yet keeps luring him so that in the end when he succumbs to the seduction he sins doubly, against his system and, more seriously, against reason, or say against his own better judgment in the Antinomies of Pure Reason.**

**Reason’s “brooding over its own concepts” which Kant sees as the mortal sin of metaphysics is for Plato the heart and core of philosophy. While Kant finds that concepts without any con-**

**nection to objects of experience are bankrupt, Plato sees that their freedom from any adulteration by such objects is their title to reality — reality, not truth; pure ideas, secure in the reality of their intrinsic meaningfulness, make no claim of conformity to actual things. They are dreams, they are myths, that enrich our spiritual life, that give us a spiritual life.**

**Beside the fundamental insight into the active role of the mind, the *Critique* performed one task well, the negative task of showing where dogmatic philosophy trespassed beyond its proper domain, though, sadly, even this has not been absorbed by philosophers; but along with the illegitimate encroachments of philosophy into foreign territory the *Critique* also excluded the lawful explorations of reason within its own domain, and in place of that it allowed us the spurious freedom of irrational faith.**

**In §46 we read that “in all substances the true subject – namely that which remains after all accidents (as predicates) have been removed – ... is unknown to us” (4:333). This is a confused and confusing mix-up of physics and metaphysics. The notion of physical substance is a fiction; the actual substance is nothing but its actual accidents. This is not the same as the notion ‘noumenon’. We find that the actual concrete thing in itself and by itself is unintelligible; its very being is a riddle. In ourselves we know that our passing states have a permanent core: our active, creative intelligence, our will. We suppose that for things in the natural world to be intelligible they must be rooted in such creative intelligence. This can neither be proved nor disproved, neither empirically nor logically. It is a metaphysical idea that confers intelligibility on things; it cannot claim to be true, for truth relates to objective reality; it only claims intrinsic self-evidence.**

**Kant comes near to getting this right in §46 where he says: “it does appear as if we have something substantial in the consciousness of our self ... for all the predicates of inner sense are referred to the *I* as subject ...”, but he spoils it all when he goes on to say. “But this expectation is disappointed. For the *I* is ... only a designation of the object of inner sense” (4.334). This is the common error of all modern thinking ever since the successes of empirical science taught us to identify the real with, and limit it to, the objective, thus rendering us incapable of entertaining the notion of metaphysical reality. And it is this that spoils Kant’s treatment of the transcendental unity of apperception in the *Critique* as I have shown in “Kant and Plato” (the first paper in this collection).**

**Kant repeatedly speaks of the soul as “an object of the inner sense”. This is the blasphemy that keeps modern thinkers out of the metaphys-**

**ical heavens. It is the delusion that beguiles Wittgenstein, making him try in vain to spy on his own soul.**

**In §52c Kant says that “it is patently contradictory to say of a mere way of representing that it also exists outside our representation” (4:341). I could make this assertion in the very same words, and have in fact been making it with a slight difference in expression; but in my philosophy the words have a meaning quite distinct from what Kant has in mind. I say that all theoretical science and all metaphysical speculation is interpretation, and as such is a mode of representation. In the case of science the representation is always an approximation and is useful or useless to the degree that it harmonizes with actuality. In the case of metaphysics the interpretation (the vision) is more or less enlightening but it cannot be said to be true or false since primari-**

ly it cannot be said to exist “outside our representation”.

In §54 Kant sets out his position on freedom and necessity succinctly and the brevity and clarity of the statement highlight the twofold error in his position. He says that “if natural necessity is referred only to appearances and freedom only to things in themselves, then no contradiction arises if both kinds of causality are assumed or conceded equally, however difficult or impossible it may be to make causality of the latter kind conceivable” (4:343). The first error is that he speaks of natural causality and of freedom as if they were of the same kind. Natural causality is a useful fiction or, in his own terminology, a concept of the understanding, while freedom is the spontaneity of creative intelligence. And here we detect the second error, for ‘causality of the latter kind’, far from being difficult or impossible’ to conceive, is the one thing that is most evident

**and most certain in us; it is nothing other than our inner reality. Failing to see this is only due to the spiritual blindness inflicted on the modern mind by the objectivism of the scientific outlook. Causal determinism is nothing but superstition.**

**In his determination of the ‘boundaries of pure reason’ Kant was right and wrong: right in insisting that our knowledge (cognition) cannot extend beyond the sphere of possible experience’ but he was wrong in denying reason (the mind, intelligence) any room for play beyond that. Since he personally could not leave God, ‘immortality’, and moral freedom out of account, he relegated these to faith and devised contorted arguments to show that the ‘possibility’ of these notions is required by Practical Reason. He was doubly wrong in this: (1) On purely rational grounds we have no justification for affirming these notions. (2) On the other hand, these notions are not merely theoretically ‘required’,**

**they are the basic constituents of our spiritual life. Human beings attained a higher plane of being when they made myths. To believe our myths is to be superstitious; to negate our myths is to be less than human. That was the doing of modern science, it turned us into clever, very clever, beasts, and we are now devouring one another.**

**Kant says that “we cannot provide ... any determinate concept of what things in themselves may be” (4:351). That is right, but it is true only of ‘things’ outside us, but we ‘know’ fully well what we are. Of ourselves, of our inner reality, we have immediate, self-evident, indubitable understanding. We are not a thing, not an entity, but activity, intelligent and creative. When we say with Plato that even things in the natural world can in the end only be conceived as nothing but *dunamis*, we are not breaching the bounds of reason; we are simply saying: that is the only way we can find things of the natural**

**world intelligible. We are then speaking mythically, poetically, philosophically and not scientifically. We are offering not knowledge but intelligibility (understanding).**

**“Natural science will never reveal to us the inside of things” (4:353). Socrates said it twenty-five centuries ago. Kant said it more than two centuries ago. Neither our philosophers nor our scientists have grasped it yet.**

**After all of Kant’s attempts to legitimize the idea of a supreme being and all his arguments against Hume’s position, he has to sum all of that up in the words “we think the world as if it derives from a supreme reason” (3:359), and that is indeed better than the subterfuge of resorting to Practical Reason and better than all his arguments here to make “the difficulties that appear to oppose theism disappear” (4:360). We know nothing of a God outside us, but the God we cre-**

**ate for ourselves makes our life richer and worthier. (Hatfield keeps Kant's transitive use of 'denken' in his translation: "we think the world". This is philosophically insightful.)**

**Nothing exemplifies the delusiveness of thinking in abstractions better than Kant's arguments in §59 where he confidently affirms that "a boundary is itself something positive". There is no end to the fallacies one can logically derive from abstractions taken to be more than fictions.**

**So, how is metaphysics possible? Or, better still, since we cannot determine the possibility of what is indeterminate to us: What metaphysics is, according to Kant, possible or permissible?**

**Metaphysics, we learn, is "a natural predisposition of reason ... but it is also of itself ... dialectical and deceitful" (4:365). We need a critique to assign to each of the three faculties – sensibility, understanding, reason (as defined by**

**Kant) – its proper function and scope. Kant is confident that metaphysics equated with such a critique “can be completed and brought into a permanent state” and that “it cannot be further changed and is not susceptible to any augmentation through new discoveries” (4:366). Now what does that leave us with? A sensible sensibility, an understanding that secures for us a science of appearances, a reason with three odd Ideals admitted only by special concession.**

**From the Appendix “On What Can Be Done in Order to Make Metaphysics As Science Actual” we can see how deeply embittered Kant was at the reception of the *Critique* and how offended he was by one particular unfavourable review. Kant convinced himself that he had finally, definitively accomplished the required *Critique of Pure Reason*, establishing once for all the possibility and the limits of synthetic *a priori* judgments. The notion of synthetic *a priori* proposi-**

tions was his original, creative contribution to philosophical thinking, but in thinking that he had established a complete, definitive *Critique of Pure Reason* he was deluded. Our reason, our creative intelligence, is our whole human reality, an unfathomable, inexhaustible reality. We can build endless theoretical systems around it by creating abstract distinctions; but those systems tumble once they pretend to be final. Had Kant separated, extended, emphasized and developed his great notion of synthetic *a priori* metaphysical judgments he would have better served himself and philosophy.

The Appendix also shows that Kant misunderstood and misjudged the Idealism of the Eleatics and of Berkeley. No one in her or his senses sees the actual world as an illusion in the common acceptance of the term. When Plato calls the whole of the natural world a world of shadows, he means that all we encounter in the natural world

**– including the ideas of power and glory and mastery – is not what deserves to be called real. It is the same idea as in the Biblical “vanity of vanities, all is vanity”. Kant’s own Transcendental Idealism was disfigured by the German Idealists who, instead of taking it to mean that reason creates the world for us, the world we live in as intelligent beings, took it to mean that reason creates the world objectively. That in itself is a very good metaphysical myth, but when we think we have thereby penetrated into the inner sanctuary of Reality, we need to hear the voice of Socrates admonishing us: he of you is wisest who, like Socrates, knows that he knows nothing. Once we confess our Socratic ignorance, Hegel will not quarrel with Schopenhauer and Schopenhauer will not find fault with Bradley, since they will all present their systems as no more than views from particular standpoints or dub them ‘likely tales’ as Plato wisely did.**

**In the final part of the Appendix Kant proposes that his work “be examined piece by piece from its foundation” (4:380). I believe that if Kant were to come among us today and see the copious scholarly examinations of his work “piece by piece from its foundation”, he would experience a graver disappointment than with the *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* review. I will not amplify on this.**

**Kant is right in holding that “there still remains a space in (the soul) that is marked off for mere pure and speculative reason” (4:381), but his system has nothing for that space but ‘faith’ supported by specious arguments. That space, that profound spiritual need, calls for imaginative, creative thinking, for poetry, traditional poetry and the poetry of ideas the greatest practitioner of which was Plato.**

**When Kant speaks of ‘ordinary metaphysics’ having already ‘produced benefits’ he is clearly thinking of Aristotelian metaphysics and its subsequent developments. Beside that and the dogmatic Rationalist metaphysics of his own time he has no notion of any other metaphysics.**

**Minds as alert as Russell’s and Whitehead’s went to Kant expecting to find demonstrative reasoning; finding none to their satisfaction, they threw the whole lot away. A poet like Coleridge found inspiration in Kant. It is a pity that in the two centuries following Kant’s death we have not had a philosopher-poet that could rightly interpret Kant. Our erudite scholars are happy analyzing, dissecting, criticizing the arguments and it does not occur to them that these are the shell that hides the rich kernel.**

**Cairo, 29 May 2015**

## NOTES

**\*1) Just as Spinoza wronged his great *Ethics* by presenting it as ‘geometrically demonstrated’. Philosophy, being of the nature of poetry, is best presented, as Plato knew, in myth, allegory, and parable.**

**\*2) In other words, to acquiesce in the ultimacy of the mystery as an ultimate dimension of ultimate Reality.**

**\*3) Hence Kant could only relegate them precariously to Practical Reason.**

**\*4) All of Plato’s seminal metaphysical notions were poetic creations clothed in myth and parable.**

**\*5) Metaphysical visions and notions cannot be true, for to be true (in the common acceptation of the term) is to be objective and objectivity is the death of philosophy.**

**\*6) Yet metaphysics is wholly and exclusively concerned with what “lies beyond the boundaries of all possible experience”. About that we may not ‘know’, we may not ‘guess’, but we can and do have creative visions that give meaning and value to human life.**

**\*7) The term ‘metaphysical’ is anachronistic here of course, but what Plato referred to indifferently as *ousia*, *to on*, *ho estin*, *alêtheia*, is what I mean by metaphysical reality.**

**\*8) *Plato’s Universe of Discourse*, 2015.**

## KANT'S MESSAGE

I have repeatedly deplored the general failure of philosophers and scholars to grasp the essence of Kant's transcendental system. The other day, flipping through the pages of the Cambridge electronic version of the First Critique, a section rubric in the Introduction by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood caught my eye; it read "The message of the critique". I thought I should read that section to check both my understanding of Kant and the justice of my censure of post-Kantian philosophers and scholars. The section opens as follows:

*"The Critique of Pure Reason is complex and many-sided. Both its overall message and its meaning for the subsequent history of philosophy defy any easy summary."*

**I find this unduly sweeping. There is no denying the Critique is “complex and many-sided” but while its convoluted complexity understandably earned Kant Nietzsche’s scathing censure and the aversion of many first-rate philosophers, yet its crucial message is to my mind simple and clear. Kant himself underlines it unmistakably when he characterizes his work as a “Copernican revolution”. I have repeatedly given the gist of it, particularly in “Kant and Plato” (in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009).**

**The whole of Kant’s message is an unconscious revival of two fundamental insights of Socrates:**

**(1) Sense impressions in themselves are meaningless; they only become meaningful perceptions when clothed in ideas (forms) from the mind (Kant’s Concepts of the Understanding).**

**(2) Investigation of phenomena, of things in the outer world, does not reveal the inner reality of things (*noumena*). Empirical science is confined to the phenomenal sphere. Examination of values, moral ideals and purposes pertains exclusively to pure reason.**

**It’s as simple as that. I feel I have exhausted the subject in these few lines. Indeed there is little deserving comment in the rest of the text of Guyer’s and Wood’s**

**Introduction. But I could not let the following passage go without a word.**

**“The originality of the *Critique* can be indicated by focusing on the way it attempts simultaneously to resolve two of the most intractable problems of early modern philosophy, the simultaneous vindication of the principle of universal causality and of the freedom of the human will.”**

**Thus Professors Guyer and Wood find Kant’s originality precisely in Kant’s worst bungled failure. As far as I can see Kant’s message is as lost on them as on the others. But I have written extensively both on the dogma of causality and on the reality of free will and do not find it suitable to discuss two major themes in a cursory note.**

**D. R. Khashaba**

**June 14, 2018**

# **KANT AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT PROMISE**

[First published in *Philosophy Pathways*]

**The 12th February 2004 marks the bicentenary of the death of Immanuel Kant, who may justly be regarded as an incarnation of the Enlightenment. Were Kant to come back into our world today, how would he view what has become of the promise of that glorious movement?**

**In 1784 Kant gave an answer to the question “What is Enlightenment?” In giving that answer Kant was in the first place concerned to distinguish between the practical need to obey the laws and institutions of society, necessary for maintaining peace and stability, on the one hand, and the freedom of thought, the right of the individu-**

al to question and criticize those very laws and institutions in public, absolutely necessary for human progress, on the other hand. Most of what Kant says in that context may now be of historical interest only\* (if we leave out of account those areas of the world where freedom of thought is still anathema). But at one point Kant draws a seminal distinction between an age of enlightenment and an enlightened age.

“If we are asked, Do we now live in an enlightened age?, the answer is: No, but we do live in an age of enlightenment. As things now stand, we still have a long way to go before men can be or can easily become capable of correctly using their own reason in religious matters with assurance, without outside guidance. But we do have clear indications that the way is now being cleared for men to work freely in this direction, and that the obstacles to general enlightenment, to man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity, are gradually becoming fewer.”

Perhaps, writing at a time when intellectual Europe was living in the euphoria of the ideals of freedom and rationalism, Kant was over-optimistic. Yet he was clear-sighted and perceptive enough to realize that, much as it was gratifying to see the good work accomplished by the great British, French, and German thinkers, and the liberalizing reforms introduced by Frederick the Great (to whom Kant's article paid deserved homage), the fulfilment of an enlightened age was a far-off goal.

During the twentieth century the hopes and dreams that were generated in the preceding two centuries were dissipated. Today, two hundred years after Kant departed our world, we cast a look on the condition of humankind, a humankind that, by the lights of eighteenth-century enlightenment and nineteenth-century progressivism, should by now have become united in peace, goodwill, and prosperity — and what do we see? It is hardly necessary to give an account: intolerance, conflict, violence, poverty, and disease not only reign in the vast backward regions but are

**also evident in what might be termed the bright spots of the advanced world.**

**But bad as it is that we have failed to make good on the promise, it is a far worse calamity that we seem to have lost the beacon that signals the way. During the twentieth century mainstream philosophy lost its bearings. Seduced by the spectacular theoretical and practical successes of the objective sciences into thinking that the methods and criteria of those sciences were the only means to truth, philosophers sought to apply those same methods and criteria to questions relating to the meaning of life and the values that give meaning to life. Philosophy, especially the Analytical species prevalent in the English-speaking world, was broken up into specialized disciplines and fragmented into particular problems, all swayed and impregnated by scientism, reductionism, and relativism. All questions of meaning and value were consigned to the rubbish heap of ‘metaphysical nonsense’.**

**On the other hand, religion, seemingly the only remaining shelter for meanings and values, con-**

**tinued to tether these meanings and values to irrational beliefs that enslave the mind and play a divisive role between peoples. Humanity was thus left to the mercy of the Scylla of amoral science and technology on the one hand and the Charybdis of dogmatic religion on the other hand. The option we were offered was: either science and no values or values bound up with what Kant called self-imposed immaturity. The ruinous abdication by philosophy of its rightful domain is the consequence of the oblivion of philosophers to a great insight first beheld clearly by Socrates and re-affirmed by Kant as by no other philosopher. Science, concerned solely and exclusively with objective existents, cannot give answers to questions about meanings and values. Only ideas engendered by the mind and to be found nowhere but in the mind (Socrates), only the pure transcendental forms supplied by reason (Kant), can secure the ideals and values and put us in touch with the realities that constitute our moral and spiritual life. Twenty-four centuries after Socrates, two centuries after**

**Kant, we badly need to re-learn the lesson.**

*[Kant's "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?" was published in the Berlinische Monatschrift for December 1784. An English translation can be accessed at:*

*<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/kant.html>]*

**\*This was written in 2004; today, sixteen years later, how sad it is to see the cause of freedom sliding back all over the world.**

**ANNEX**

**WHAT IDEALISM IS NOT**

## WHAT IDEALISM IS NOT

**In all my writings I have been trying to advance an understanding of metaphysical idealism. It may be helpful to say something about what idealism is not. Philosophical idealism (Plato's, Berkeley's, Kant's (?), Hegel's, Bradley's) does not say that the objects we see and handle are an illusion. It is rather physicists who tell us that the red rose is not really red. And in a way they are right. In itself the rose is not red. The colour red that we see is a product of the three-cornered interplay of the light, the rose, and the eye. To insist that the rose is not really red is not idealism but what Whitehead called the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness.**

**Idealism does not say that there is nothing in the world but my thoughts, that I am at the centre of things and that all things around me are nothing but my thoughts. This is**

**not idealism but solipsism and I am not now discussing solipsism. Berkeley definitely did not hold that the objects in the world are my thoughts. Berkeley said two things (1) Following Locke, Berkeley said that all we know of the things in the world are the perceptions we receive through our senses: that when I say there is a mountain out there I mean I perceive a mountain out there or that it is possible for a percipient to perceive a mountain out there. (2) Precisely because Berkeley held that the mountain I perceive has actual being out there and because he held that we know of no substance over and above or beyond the perceptions\*1) and because perceptions must be in a mind — precisely because he had no scepticism about the actuality of the mountain, that he thought the perceptions that constitute the world must be in the mind of God. Think what you may of Berkeley's vision but don't say that the things around us were for Berkeley an illusion.**

**Plato never put the actuality of actual things in doubt. Plato despised the pleasures, the pains, the glories that the world oppresses us with. The poorest psychologist will tell you that a person you despise is much more present for you than all those you neither hate nor love.**

**Kant decidedly did not deny the actuality of things outside us. Kant said the things outside us in themselves are meaningless. That bright disk above my head at night is just that; it is Astronomy that tells me it is a massive body reflecting the rays of the sun. Before Astronomy it was a god or goddess. In either case what I know of it is what I *know* of it and what I know of it is what my mind (Understanding in Kant's terminology) makes of it. For Kant, no more than for the savage worshipping the moon, no more than for Newton puzzling about its motion, was the actuality of the bright disk up there an illusion or only an idea in my mind.\*2)**

**We all occasionally have illusions or visual deceptions. We recognize them as such and clearly distinguish them from genuine perceptions. The persistence of illusion defines lunacy. The Indian hermit in his forest refuge, leaving the world behind him as deceptive *maya*, distinguishes clearly between the deceptiveness of the things he renounces and the illusoriness of the red spot he sees, having chanced to fix his eye for a while on the sun for a while.**

**But perhaps it's no use trying to explain this. Plato was right. The Gods and the Giants (*Sophist*, 245e-246e) will never come to an understanding. The difference be-**

**tween them is temperamental, else Aristotle would not have so grossly misunderstood Plato.**

**\***

**Empiricists think that the quintessence of knowledge is objectivity. I will not contest that. But that is one kind of knowledge, scientific knowledge, for the core principle of science is objectivity. But philosophical understanding is a totally different thing. Philosophical understanding is first and last subjective. Kierkegaard said, Truth is subjectivity. Better said, Understanding is subjectivity. You don't understand a concerto by having adequate knowledge about the instruments, about the physical laws of sound, about the physiology of hearing. You can know all that and yet remain unreceptive to what the composer wanted to convey. You understand a concerto by clothing the sounds in forms emanating from your subjective experience. That is why I insist that using the words 'knowledge' and 'understanding' as equivalents is confusing.\*3)**

**\***

**Where my philosophy develops beyond Plato is in explaining that the reality of the ideas is secondary. What is ultimately real is the mind that creates the ideas; but this statement is also mixed with falsehood; for it is not the**

mind as a thing (substance or even simply entity) but it is the sheer pure creativity that is ultimately real. The crux of my philosophy is the seeming paradox: What is real does not exist but gives birth to all existents. What is real is the *hupodochê* of Plato's *Timaeus*, the womb of all being and all becoming, but it is not an existent womb: its reality is its fecundity, its eternal *tokos en kalôi*. What exists is essentially evanescent; it cannot be real or the source of reality. This is the gist of my *Creative Eternity*.

August 16, 2016.

## NOTES

\*1) The notion of substance is in truth an invention of Aristotle's, transmuted by Leibniz into something different and by Spinoza into yet another totally different thing. Spinoza's Substance is Parmenides's One.

\*2) Kant's transcendental idealism comes to this: what we know about natural things is what our mind tells us about natural things, which is just another way of saying what Plato said: we know

**the forms (characters) our mind confers on things.**

**\*3) It would spare us much confusion and misunderstanding if we agreed to say: science gives us knowledge, the knowledge that is power (or catastrophe) ; philosophy, poetry, art, give us understanding, the understanding that is bliss.**

## WORKS BY D. R. Khashaba

All can be freely downloaded from own page on Archive.org:  
<https://archive.org/details/@daoudkhashaba>

*Let Us Philosophize* (1998, 2008)

*Plato: An Interpretation* (2005)

*Socrates' Prison Journal* (2006)

*Hypatia's Lover* (2006)

*The Sphinx and the Phoenix* (2009)

*Plato's Memoirs* (2010)

*Quest of Reality* (2013)

*Metaphysical Reality* (2014)

*Plato's Universe of Discourse* (2015)

*Creative Eternity: A Metaphysical Myth* (2016)

*Last Words: philosophical papers* (2017)

“Stephen Hawking's Bad Metaphysics”

“Eternity and Freedom”

*Philosophy of Creative Eternity*

(*Creative Eternity* and “Eternity and Freedom” jointly)

*In Praise of Philosophical Ignorance* (2018)

*2998 a philosophical romance* (2018)

*Goodbye to Philosophy* (2018)

*Spaces in Spaceless Thought* (2019)

*The World Within* (2020)

