

METHOD AND ILLUSION IN KANT'S *INAUGURAL* *DISSERTATION OF 1770*

Giulio GORIA¹

1. METHOD AND ILLUSION AS A PROJECT OF METAPHYSICS

In addition to the idea that sensibility and intellect could occupy qualitatively irreducible realms and that the *great light* could have led to a path towards criticism, there is another point of entry to Kant's famous 1770 work, *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis*. This involves, in particular, the project to achieve a metaphysical cognition of reality, a legacy left by *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, despite the fact that it excludes its transcendent scope²; it, therefore, renders central the function of illusion as an integral part of a method developed to avoid the mistakes caused by incorrectly applying sensitive conditions to the objects of reason.

This method is intended as an instrument for avoiding metaphysical errors, without therefore doing away with the possibility of a metaphysics *tout court*. In a letter addressed to Lambert, dated September 2, 1770, Kant shed light on this intention:

The most universal laws of sensibility play an unjustifiably large role in metaphysics, where, after all, it is merely concepts and principles (*Grundsätze*) of pure reason that are at issue. A quite special, though purely negative science, general phenomenology (*phaenomenologia generalis*), seems to me to be presupposed by metaphysics. In it the principles of sensibility, their validity and their limitations, would be determined, so that these principles could not be confusedly applied to objects of pure reason, as has heretofore almost always happened. For space and time, and the axioms for considering all things under these conditions, are, with respect to empirical knowledge and all objects of sense, very real; they are actually the *conditions* of all appearances and of all empirical

judgments. But extremely mistaken conclusions emerge if we apply the basic concepts of sensibility to something that is not at all an object of sense, that is, something thought through a universal or a pure concept of the understanding as a thing or substance in general, and so on (Br, AA 10, pp. 96-99, pp. 59-60).

This passage shows that Kant believed he had located the ultimate root of mistakes in the realm of metaphysics. Attempts to subordinate concepts which are thought intellectually, i.e. as universal and pure concepts of reason, to the conditions of sensibility appear to be the result of confusing distinct realms, both of which need an operation to limit their respective claims, which will be at the center of the critique. While in *Dreams* Kant had mainly concentrated on checking the claims of the intellect, in the *Dissertatio* he focuses his greatest efforts on delimiting the use of the principles of sensibility.

It is clear, however, that the full diagnosis of the mistakes that metaphysics always risks making has its presupposition and starting point in the gap between sensibility and intellect, which guides the entire work of 1770, and which is, therefore, probably the most significant result of that “great light [*großes Licht*]”, to which Kant came the previous year and with which scholars have grappled extensively³.

The line of thought, starting from the second section of the *Inaugural-Dissertation*, first makes a distinction between two faculties; one, sensibility [*sensualitas*], the receptivity of a subject's own representative state to be affected by the presence of an object, and the other, intelligence [*rationalitas*], as the capacity to represent that which, by its conformation [*per qualitatem suam*], cannot affect the senses. This is followed by a distinction between the level of the object, phenomenon the first, and noumenon the second, and then the division between sensitive cognition “in so far as it is subject to the laws of sensibility” and intellectual, or rational, cognition “in so far as it is subject to the laws of intelligence” (*Dissertatio*, AA 2, 392, p. 384).

On this point, after having formulated the distinction between *phenomena* and *noumena* and the corresponding definition of cognition, Kant makes an argument clearly directed at dividing the tension between the ontological and epistemological regimes. He writes:

In this way, whatever in cognition is sensitive is dependent upon the special character of the subject in so far as the subject is capable of this or that modification by the presence of objects: these modifications may differ in different cases, according to the variations in the subjects. But whatever cognition is exempt from such subjective conditions relates only to the object. It is thus clear that things which are thought sensitively are representations of things *as they appear*, while things which

<https://doi.org/10.36311/2318-0501.2020.v8n2.04.p37>

are intellectual are representations of things *as they are* (Dissertatio, AA 2, p. 393, p. 384).

While the fact of connecting sensitive knowledge to the character of the subject leads to making the distinction, typically modern and specifically Lockean, between the primary and secondary qualities, it is also true that Kant's position is more developed. This greater complexity, a constant thereafter, is based on having related space and time within the realm of subjectivity and having thereby allowed many perceived characteristics of the object to access the objective sphere of experience. This was the direction that his first *Critique* took, but the factor constituting the major shift in thinking can already be found here. Specifically, this was that sensibility and intellect have two entirely unique and distinct abilities to represent objects; within the context of the later criticism, they find *common* articulation in an a priori transcendental synthesis. In an earlier stage, these are two ways of representing things, the first *uti apparent* and the second *sicuti sunt*.

The latter theory is a picture of the theoretical crux around which almost all of the *Dissertation* revolves. It gains even more clarity if considered in light of the statement that Kant placed at the opening of his work, despite the opinions of it in the first and fourth sections being somewhat disparaging.

The duality between “concept” and “intuition” is indeed the lynchpin of the introduction of the ideas of analysis and synthesis: “It is one thing, given the parts, to conceive for oneself the *composition* of the whole, using an abstract *concept* of the understanding, and it is another thing to *follow up* this general concept [...] by the sensitive faculty of cognition, that is to say, to represent the same concept to oneself in the concrete by a distinct intuition” (*Dissertatio*, AA 2, p. 387, p. 377). It seems that here the subjective status of space and time, and the principles that are therefore only applicable to sensitive cognition, is that which marks the split between the two faculties. This is why Kant maintains that the *dissensus* between sensitive and intellectual faculties “points only to the fact that the abstract ideas which the mind entertains when they have been received from the understanding very often cannot be followed up in the concrete and converted into intuitions” (*Dissertatio*, AA 2, p. 389, p. 379).

The conclusion that Kant comes to from this is that any cognition outside the subjective condition applying to the representations of phenomena is an objective cognition, tied to *sicuti sunt* entities. He emphasizes that this “subjective opposition” [*reluctantia*] only apparently takes on an objective status, but that this is only the illusion of those identifying the limits circumscribing the human mind with the terms that figure the essence of things in

<https://doi.org/10.36311/2318-0501.2020.v8n2.04.p37>

themselves. This constitutes the figure of a subjectivity on whose capacity tensions and conflicts are conveyed of the type mentioned, between a sensitive and an objective cognition, between phenomenon and noumenon, between principles of sensibility and intellectual principles. This perspective becomes an area of major interest within the criticism, but in this nascent state, it shows factors of discontinuity with the previous metaphysical tradition. But that which seems to be an even greater shift, later abandoned at a critical level, is the idea that the principles of intellectual cognition simultaneously express the conditions for the real possibilities of entities. In several points, the *Dissertatio* reiterates the equation between conditions for intellectual knowledge and conditions for the real possibility of things; this thesis is the starting point from which Kant takes off to mold his theory on the errors of metaphysics.

2. STATUS OF INTELLECT AND ROLE OF REFLECTION

This was more than giving an account, or taking up the broader debate, regarding a possible epistemological interpretation, or, on the contrary, an ontological interpretation of the phenomena/noumena distinction. The question of the status of the intellect can be rather directed at the attempt to highlight the tensions running throughout Kant's text⁴.

When Kant is faced with the problem of specifying the nature of intellectual objects [*intellectualia*], he resorts to the familiar distinction between the real and logical use of the intellect. The former includes “the concepts themselves, whether of things or relations”, and the latter include concepts, however they are given, as subordinated to each other, the less general to the superior or as connected based on identity and difference (*Dissertatio*, AA 2, 393, p. 385). The subordination of the sensitive knowledge of common concepts, as well as that of phenomena to the general laws of phenomena, is thus attributable to the use of logic. In this sense, the synthesis that the intellect does is to refer to the objects of sensibility and to offer a simple logical subordination. As an evidence of the extent to which the real possibility of things is in play at this point, Kant says that cognitions “are called sensitive *on account of their genesis* and not on account of their *comparison* in respect of identity or opposition” (*Dissertatio*, AA 2, p. 393, p. 385).

Another important aspect emerges here. The activity of the intellect with regard to the construction of experience and its form, although still exclusively logical, acquires a specific reflective quality. He writes on this point:

In the case of sensible things and the phenomena, that which precedes the logical use of the understanding is called appearance, while the reflective cognition, which arises when several appearances are compared by the understanding, is called experience. Thus, there is no way from appearance to experience except by reflection in accordance with the logical use of the understanding (Dissertatio, AA 2, 394, p. 386).

It should, therefore, be noted that we can see within the logical use of the intellect two theoretical principles or different functionalities that coexist, connected to one another: one that subordinates sensitive cognitions and the other cognitions of the same type or shared concepts, and the other consisting in comparing different aspects of the intellect. Experience, therefore, is the result of these operations that describe a reflective activity of the intellect.

As such, it is significant that within the *Logikvorlesungen* from the early 1770s, Kant gave a definition of experience [*Erfahrung*] as “Eine reflectirte Empfindung”⁵, effectively confirming the direction of the *Dissertatio*. This meaning of *reflectio* effectively seems to give the general characteristic of a thought that can operate with data by connecting and organizing them, but without being a productive source of data. In this sense, reflection is the operation that corresponds to the logical generality and the discursive character of a thought in general⁶. It should be added, however, starting from those same years, that reflection took on a decisive importance in the lessons on logic, and especially later at a critical level in the appendix about the *Amphiboly of the Concepts of Reflection*. Transcendental reflection is put into play in the conclusion of Transcendental Analytic and has its root in the idea of *Überlegung* that Kant explains in the lessons on logic. According to a dictation of these lessons, seemingly unchanged from *Logik Blomberg* (1771) to *Logik Busolt* (1789-1790), reflecting means “comparing a cognition with the power of cognition from which it is supposed to arise (sensibility or the understanding)”⁷. In this regard, in *Logik Blomberg* we can note a clear distinction between the two activities, both tied to the spontaneity of the intellect, reflection and investigation (*Untersuchung*):

Reflecting is distinct from *investigating* and *investigation*. *To reflect* is to compare something with the laws of the understanding. *To investigate*, however, is actually to reflect mediately. Concerning many things we can quite well cognize without investigation what is true, what false. But *reflection*, on the other hand, is always necessary for any judgment, and for the distinction of the true from the false, even if it be in general, or in a [particular] cognition, etc., in all cases indispensable (V-Lo/Blomberg, AA 24, p. 161, p. 127).

In reflection, more than the search for the basis for a judgment for or against, the problem is whether and how a judgment is connected to objective principles and, therefore, whether it can represent an objective validity; in short, it is a question on the possibility of bringing a judgment within the faculty of the intellect or not⁸. With these texts in mind, on the basis of which the profile of transcendental reflection emerges, Dieter Henrich emphasized in particular the fact that in Kant's eyes, reflection is a precondition of conscious rationality, which identifies the critical investigation (*Untersuchung*), separate from reflection in the lessons of logic, and then returns significantly in the Appendix of the first *Critique*⁹. This is Henrich's argument. Given that our cognitive faculties form a mixed fabric and are not spontaneously reduced to one and only one intellectual operation within a defined domain of application, in order to have a genuine cognition, we must have a preliminary control that brings these operations within the bounds of their own domain. This is the task of reflection. This interpretation has the advantage of shedding light on the operational context of reflection, identifying it in a perspective that comes before, or is at least "lateral," to that of the transcendental judgment. Henrich is, therefore, right to emphasize the importance of this *metacognitive* function taken on by reflection in itself; in a sense, this already alludes to a "topic" of the intellect, as it operates on the level of provisional judgments, impeding them from turning into definitive judgments. Based on this context given by Kantian lessons on logic, we can return to the outline of the reflected experience that emerged in the *Inaugural-Dissertation*. It seems possible to suggest that the question by then at the center of the *Amphiboly* had already emerged at this point, specifically that it has its seed in the problem of how to articulate a dual activity of the intellect, comparison and subordination, within a notion of the world based on the unity of concept and intuition¹⁰.

When it comes to intellect in its real use, the operative sphere of this function refers to the *intellectualia*. Once again, the cognitive and ontological levels interweave, presenting a symmetry that serves as a background to the entire work. However, Kant repeatedly observes that pure intellect provides abstract and general concepts and that this makes it incompatible with any access to a particular noumenal object. This does not change the assumption that intellectual cognition has a specific relative faculty in relation to the real being¹¹. And, thus, perhaps even more than a noumenal object with a status apart from the sensitive one, the intellect provides access to the intelligible forms of things. In the context of this interweaving of considerations, all more or less distinctly present in the *Dissertatio*, Kant describes this *intellectualia* as concepts that are "given by the very nature of the understanding" and are

“abstracted from no use of the senses” and contain “no form of sensitive cognition” (Dissertatio, AA 2, p. 394, p. 386).

He then adds a further distinction, within the true use of the intellect, between two different ends of the concepts: the elenctic and the dogmatic.

The concepts of the understanding have, in particular, two ends. The first is elenctic, in virtue of which they have a negative use, where, namely, they keep what is sensitively conceived distinct from noumena, and, although they do not advance science by the breadth of a fingernail, they nonetheless preserve it from the contagion of errors. The second end is dogmatic, and in accordance with it, the general principles of the pure understanding, such as are displayed in ontology or in rational psychology, lead to some paradigm, which can only be conceived by the pure understanding and which is a common measure for all other things in so far as they are realities. This paradigm is NOUMENAL PERFECTION (Dissertatio, AA 2, p. 396, p. 388).

Again, on the dual profile of the intellect in its real use, we cannot say that Kant is particularly clear. Yet, it is also evident that this is one of the most significant passages in terms of setting the framework that circumscribes the use of the subjective principles to the sphere determined by the conditions of subjectivity. It is obvious that this task is part of the ends that shape the intellect in its operations. Even though this means that this function involves keeping things conceived through the senses apart from noumena, it does not automatically translate into a simple partition of the objective world into two series, one phenomenal and the other noumenal. The step we have suggested is the demonstration of how far Kant stood from such a solution to the problem, which, in truth, would have little resolution power.

The first principles of the science of the intellect need support from a preliminary method that can discern between sensitive and intellectual cognition, and this is the premise for the negative or elenctic function assigned to the intellect. But here too, as in *Dreams*, a step of this kind had already laid the foundations, observing that the limits of experience serve to highlight the field beyond which our concepts are short of content and data. Metaphysics, provided this negative preparation, will continue not to produce substantial cognition but will express a certain maximization of knowledge. Here in the *Dissertatio*, as well as later in his first *Critique*, there is a protection against this, the limitation of the abuses of sensibility. This is something of an immunization from error, which is a risk not only for the universal faculty of the mind, but equally so for sensibility.

Kant was thinking of precisely such a discipline, when in the *Critique* he offers what may be the only working and not in the least arbitrary definition of the noumenon as a “boundary concept”, the use of which is only negative and acts within the limitation of sensibility, of which it must be able to “limit the pretension” (A 255/B 311).

Sensibility does indeed have the power to rein in and think about things without reference to our way of intuition and to understand them as things in themselves, rather than as products according to space and time. In this sense, the noumenon is a problematic concept (*problema*) in relation to our intuition, because of the possibility that this intuition is not unique, as “one cannot assert of sensibility that it is the only possible kind of intuition” (A 254/B 310). Though it does not go beyond this problematic realm, the intellect must be brought to this extreme end. But this must be without fear of falling into the performative contradiction of denying in content what we are saying in the act of speaking, i.e., the existence of a real noumenon.

This function seems to be fully present in the elenctic use proposed in the *Dissertatio*, especially because here it is already explicitly excluded that the negative use of the noumenon allows for the knowledge of things as they are *in reality*. Further confirmation comes from the dogmatic use of the noumenon, which requires particular attention and caution. Kant tells us that this provides the way for the general principles of the intellect to culminate in an exemplary measure pertaining to all things *quoad realitates*. Here Kant speaks of principles, as he had previously called “*principia usus intellectus puri*” the principles that provide the content to metaphysics; examples are provided by some of those that would later be the following categories: possibility, existence, necessity, substance, and cause. It is in their nature that Kant reveals their origin, which is not innate but acquired in an original way, as he will also do much later in his *Streitschrift* against Eberhard¹².

This is quite different from arguing that the intellect alone accesses particular noumenal objects, be it the soul or God; to do so, we would need a guarantee of a “singular concrete” that only intellectual intuition could provide, and which Kant himself explicitly denies as being part of the human faculties¹³. Pure intellect, in contrast, lets us conceive things in terms that are general enough in accord with an ideal without any of the limitations of the senses. This has elenctic features in which the intellect is the bearer of a capacity for indeterminately thinking the possibility of things regardless of the forms of sensibility: however, this ability leads to a dogmatic use, for which he maintains that we can consider the *intellectualia* the real foundations of phenomena. This is the only way to understand the argument of the *perfectio*

<https://doi.org/10.36311/2318-0501.2020.v8n2.04.p37>

noumenon applied to the Supreme Being. God as Supreme Being is not only the ideal of maximum perfection, and therefore the principle of knowledge, it is also the “principle of the creation of all perfection” (AA 2: 397, 389) and therefore the first principle of existence.

3. ONTOLOGY AND THE METHOD OF METAPHYSICS

Regarding the real use of the intellect, Kant uses the term ontology to define the discipline that, together with rational psychology, provides the general principles of the intellect, those that are originally acquired by means of the intellect itself¹⁴. Partly by connecting it to the preliminary function that this discipline has for metaphysics, in part returning to the objective of the work as stated at the start of the first section, Kant opens the fifth and last section of the *Dissertatio* by introducing the topic of the method of metaphysics. He does this first by distinguishing between the sciences whose principles are laid by means of intuition, such as natural science and geometry, in which *usus dat methodum*, and pure philosophy, such as metaphysics, where “method precedes all sciences” (*Dissertatio*, AA 2, p. 411, p. 406). The discriminating element is provided by the different kind of origin between sensitive principles and “concepts of things and of relations, and the axioms themselves” (*Ibid.*). If the space of metaphysics is the real use of the intellect, which prevents it from proceeding like all the other sciences by empirical trial, it is, therefore, necessary that “the right use of reason” be that which “sets up the very principles themselves”. In other words, the exposition of the laws of pure reason is the genesis of science. In this perspective, the method of metaphysics and the real use of the intellect coincide¹⁵. These assertions give a precise approach to the problem of method. Firstly, according to Kant, philosophy and method belong to each other in a more original way than regarding other sciences. If philosophy does intend to present itself as a science, it needs a method, meaning a specific way of acquiring its knowledge. In the absence of this, what could confer determination, meaning and destination to philosophical knowledge? But while the problem of method presents itself in this way, we come to something of a stumbling block that concerns philosophy alone. Only metaphysics — though it would apply as well to critical philosophy as a preparation for metaphysics — cannot assume an already fully constituted method, nor allow that it be obtained by the mere accumulation of empirical results, i.e., through use. In order to have a method endowed with truth, and therefore capable of leading us where and how it purports to do, it must already belong to the true knowledge that is, however, its objective. In light of this problem, a possible solution may be to coincide the real use of the intellect with the method of metaphysics; this

<https://doi.org/10.36311/2318-0501.2020.v8n2.04.p37>

makes it possible to avoid the split between the exposition of knowledge and its production, which causes the circularity between the scientific claim of philosophy and method. This theme is indeed one that returns decisively in the first Critique; the reason is very likely because in 1770 there was still too much ambiguity about the status of the intellectualia to be able to critically develop and deconstruct the theoretical structure of the real use of the intellect.

What we see in the *Dissertatio* conveys an interesting suggestion of what would determine the object of the transcendental method: “the infection of sensitive cognition by cognition deriving from understanding”; the risk is not only pertaining to those who will be fooled “in the application of principles” but also that which is at the origin of “spurious principles themselves in the guise of axioms” (*Dissertatio*, AA 2, 411, p. 407). We must, therefore, avoid principles of sensitive knowledge from going beyond their limits and invading the field of intellectual knowledge. It is indeed possible that from a logical point of view, a sensitive concept, regarding the sensitive conditions of knowledge, takes a position to prove the condition of an intellectual concept [intellectualis]. The example is given by the common axiom, “Whatever exists, is somewhere”, in which the predicate that expresses the sensitive conditions of knowledge is illegitimately enunciated by a subject of the judgment that expresses any existing entity (“anything whatsoever which exists”) (*Dissertatio*, AA 2, 413, p. 408). Here Kant seems to distinguish between the mere fallacy of subreption and the metaphysical fallacy of subreption; the former is described as the binding claim of conveying intellectual concepts to sensitive conditions, and the latter describes the exchange of what belongs to the intellect with that which rightly belongs to the sensitive sphere¹⁶. Regardless, the term “subreption” means an error resulting from the illegitimate substitution of concepts and terms of one kind with those of a different kind. In this specific case, the different types are the different faculties that belong to the human capacity for knowledge. A confirmation of this comes from Kant’s lessons on logic from the same period; in *Logik* Blomberg there is a reference to the *vitium subreptionis* as an illegitimate mixture of concepts of experience and those of reason¹⁷. Among the examples that Kant gives of metaphysical illusion, particular attention is due to the second class of prejudices, and among these, the second subreptitious axiom, which arises from an arbitrary inversion of the principle of contradictions.

Here, the problem is raised by the illegitimate transposition of the contradiction as coincident with the field of impossibility. If everything simultaneously is and is not, then it follows that it is impossible, and the inverse judgment is not legitimate. Maintaining that “everything impossible simultaneously is and is not” does nothing but attribute a universal

characteristic to an object of reason [obiecto rationis] through sensitive cognition. On the contrary, possibility and impossibility, as concepts of reason, are not equivalent, nor can they be made equivalent to the concept of contradiction, which according to Kant contains time relations; for this reason, it is not legitimate to state that “whatever does not involve a contradiction is, therefore, possible” (Dissertatio, AA 2, p. 416, p. 412). Hence, the lack of contradiction is not enough to affirm the real possibility of something, as any architectonic mind believes it can maintain by imagining natural forces which, however, turn out to be mere chimeras.

The mistake of subreption occurs due to our inability to recognize the distinction of type between the sensitive and intellectual spheres, with the result that in judgment, the concepts belonging to both are used without adequate discernment, i.e., in an unconditional way. In a sense, sensualizing intellectual concepts and principles is the origin of the metaphysical illusion. Not because they do not need a sensitive restriction to acquire an empirical meaning, as will be clarified in critical terms, but because this *Versinnlichung* does not eliminate the need to restrain the claims of sensibility.

To sum up Kant's argument, the mistakes of metaphysics arise from fallacious judgments, which in turn originate from the unconscious confusion between the two different origins from which all representations come. This confusion is possible in the absence of a reflection that brings each representation back to the original and transcendental place from which it arose. In the absence of this reflection, what prevails is the illusion that our sensitive knowledge is knowledge of things as they are in reality.

In the last section of the work, we return to the concern that led Kant to reserve a central function for the negative use of intellectualia, as able to separate sensitive knowledge from noumena. Thus, we may be able to understand how the ultimate purpose of the elenctic use of the intellect serves as the limitation to the claims of sensibility and, therefore, a sort of immunization of knowledge from the contagion of metaphysical error. From this perspective, the *Dissertatio* itself is suggested as a methodical preparatory discipline that draws a distinctive line between sensitive and intellectual cognition.

4. SUBREPTION AND TRANSCENDENTAL DEMONSTRATIONS

We have sought to suggest three crucial points in the *Dissertation* that have significant theoretical continuity. These include the preparatory character of the discipline presented in

this work (also called “ontology”) with respect to metaphysics, the negative or elenctic function of the real use of the intellect, and the fallacy of metaphysical subreption based on confusing the original spheres of representations. H. E. Allison has emphasized this latter point in particular. He has identified two modes, quite different yet complementary, in which the inadequate or failed recognition of the influence of sensibility upon the intellect leads to metaphysical error. This would be at the origin of two assumptions: on the one hand, the assumption (which assumes Lockean features in the first *Critique*) that sensitive conditions are themselves ontological conditions of things in themselves; on the other hand, the opposite position, attributable to Leibniz, that precludes recognizing sensibility as the origin of the restriction and realization of the categories of the intellect. Both positions result in the same illegitimate extension of categories to things in themselves, in relation to which transcendental reflection operates¹⁸.

However, alongside this continuity between the fallacy of subreption and the concepts of transcendental reflection, we see another element of comparison between *the Dissertatio* and the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This element comes from the significant presence of subreption in the theory of transcendental demonstrations given in the "Doctrine of Method" of the first *Critique* with the aim of providing a methodical discipline to the proofs of pure principles of the intellect or transcendental propositions.

The third rule of these proofs prescribes that they are always ostensive, or direct, meaning able to connect “the certainty of truth to the knowledge of its sources” (A 789/B 817). According to Kant, this kind of proof, compared to the apagogic kind, has a considerable disadvantage in terms of evidence, but his argumentation on this is rather erratic (A 789/B 817). In short: the philosophical method works with valid definitions that are mere “expositions of given data [als Expositionen gegebener]”. Therefore, it must start with concepts that it has available as data, organizing them for a possible experience, to provide a general-ostensive knowledge. This kind of knowledge is produced by the occurrence of its own conditions, it shows itself by showing those conditions, and it expresses nothing but the conditions of this manifestation.

These principles are therefore demonstrated by going back to what they render possible, namely experience (A 737/B 765). In the circular nature of the transcendental proof, we see one of the problems that led Kant to deem his entire *Critique* “a treatise on method” (B XXII). It is significant that, although lacking the awareness of later years, Kant had indeed touched upon a not too distant problem, introducing in 1770 the question of method and its

<https://doi.org/10.36311/2318-0501.2020.v8n2.04.p37>

problematic and, in a certain way, circular placement within of the real use of the intellect.

In the passages of the *Critique* to which we want to draw attention (A 792/B 820), Kant contrasts the ostensive method of proof with an indirect procedure, which he calls *modus ponens* but is, in fact, the medieval *modus tollendo ponens*. This apagogic proof has the characteristic of proposing a formally legitimate inference, derived from the fact that the conditions for proposing an antithesis are always possible (A 791/B 829). In order to limit the field of use of this procedure, according to Kant:

Apagogic proof, however, can be allowed only in those sciences where it is impossible to substitute that which is subjective in our representations for that which is objective, namely the cognition of what is in the object. Where the latter is the dominant concern, however, then it must frequently transpire that the opposite of a certain proposition either simply contradicts the subjective conditions of thought but not the object, or else that both propositions contradict each other only under a subjective condition that is falsely held to be objective, and that since the condition is false, both of them can be false, without it being possible to infer the truth of one from the falsehood of the other (A 791/B 819).

The only field in which the apagogic proof is allowed is that in which the subjective of our representations cannot be confused with the object of knowledge. Kant adds that in mathematics this "subreption" is impossible, which is why indirect proof is effective in its formal sphere. Kant expresses uncertainty about the natural sciences, but none about pure reason because "the transcendental attempts of pure reason [...] are all conducted within the real medium of dialectical illusion, i.e., the subjective which offers itself to or even forces itself upon reason as objective in its premises" (A 792/B 820).

To justify a claim, it is not enough to refute the opposite thesis. This is a thesis that had already been proven in the *Dissertatio*, by discussing the second subreptic axiom of the second kind of prejudices; in that context, Kant stated that the failure to detect the contradiction, and so the impossibility of a thing, is not allowed to reach the real possibility of a thing. Thus, in the "Doctrine of Method," Kant observes that formal correctness is not enough with regard to synthetic claims; it is not enough to refute one thesis to make the other more sound. In addition to formal a criterion of objective validity, i.e. a principle of meaningfulness, is indeed necessary. In this sense, the function that will correspond, on a critical level, to the ostensive proof can already be identified in the "principium reductionis" that Kant defines in section 25 of the *Dissertatio*. This principle can be understood as the true demonstrative assumption expressed by the *Dissertatio*; it states that everything that is part of space and time refers to a concept of

<https://doi.org/10.36311/2318-0501.2020.v8n2.04.p37>

the intellect and can be asserted exclusively as a condition for the empirical validity of knowledge. This demand for validity cannot be met only through a formally correct proof; it must be shown that what is subjective does not provide the premises of reason in the guise of an objective element. What the Critique added to this need was the way in which the conditions of this validity, on which Kant had started to see clarity in 1770, come to be produced in us and outside of us.

Abstract: In his Inaugural Dissertation *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis*, Kant renders central the function of illusion as an integral part of a method for avoiding metaphysical errors, without therefore doing away with the possibility of a metaphysics at all. In this paper, my aim is to draw attention to three crucial points in the *Dissertation* that have significant theoretical continuity: 1) the preparatory character of the discipline presented in this work (also called "ontology") with respect to metaphysics, 2) the negative or elenctic function of the real use of the intellect, and 3) the fallacy of metaphysical subreption. Secondly, I want to point out the significant presence of subreption in the theory of transcendental demonstrations given in the "Doctrine of Method" of the first *Critique* with the aim of providing a methodical discipline to the proofs of pure principles of the intellect or transcendental propositions.

Keywords: Inaugural Dissertation – Ontology - Metaphysical Subreption - Transcendental Demonstrations - Doctrine of Method

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

References to Kant's works are to the volume and page number of the Akademie Ausgabe = AA (*Gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg.: Bd. 1-22 Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Bd. 23 Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, ab Bd. 24 Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Berlin, 1900 et seqq.).

Tr = *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (AA 2)

Dissertatio = *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis* (AA 2)

KrV = *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (A: 1781/B: 1787)

Entdeckung = *Über eine Entdeckung, nach der alle neue Kritik der reinen Vernunft durch eine ältere entbehrlich gemacht werden soll* (AA 8)

Log = *Logik Jäsche* (AA 9)

Refl = *Reflexionen* (AA 14-19)

V-Lo/Blomberg = *Logik Blomberg* (AA 24)

V-Lo/Busolt = *Logik Busolt* (AA 24)

<https://doi.org/10.36311/2318-0501.2020.v8n2.04.p37>

V-Lo/Philippi = *Logik Philippi* (AA 24)

TRANSLATIONS OF KANT'S WRITINGS IN OTHER LANGUAGES

Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770, Edited by Walford, D. in collaboration with Meerbote, R., Cambridge: CUP, 1992.

Kants Philosophical Correspondence (1759-99), Edited and translated by Zweig A., Chicago: UCP, 1967.

Critique of Pure Reason, Edited and translated by P. Guyer, A.W. Wood, Cambridge: CUP, 1998.

Lectures on Logic, Edited and translated by J.M Young, Cambridge: CUP, 1992.

The Kant-Eberhard Controversy, Edited and translated by H. E. Allison, Baltimore and London: Baltimore University Press, 1973.

REFERÊNCIAS / REFERENCES

Agostini, Igor, *Introduzione*, in I. Kant, *Dissertazioni latine*, Edited by I. Agostini, Milan: Bompiani, 2014.

Allison, Henry E., *Kant's Transcendental Idealism. An Interpretation and Defense*, New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2004.

Baum, Manfred, *Kants kritischer Rationalismus. Zur Entwiklung des Vernunftbegriffs nach 1770*, in Id., *Kleine Schriften 1. Arbeiten zur theoretischen Philosophie Kants*, hrsg. M. Heinz, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019.

Bird, Graham, *The Revolutionary Kant. A Commentary of the Critique of Pure Reason*, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 2004.

Birken-Bertsch, Hanno, *Subreption und Dialektik: Der Begriff des Fehlers der Erschleichung in der Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2006.

Grier, Michelle, *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*, Cambridge: CUP, 2004.

Henrich, Dieter, *Kant's Notion of a Deduction and the Methodological Background of the First Critique*, in *Kant's Transcendental Deductions. The Three 'Critiques' and the 'Opus Postumum'*, Edited by E. Förster, California: Stanford University Press, 1989.

Heßbrüggen-Walter, Stefan, *Topik, Reflexion und Vorurteilkritik: Kants "Amphibolie der Reflexionsbegriffe" im Kontext*, "Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie", Bd. 86, 2004.

Hinske, Norbert, *La via kantiana alla filosofia trascendentale*, tr. it. a cura di R. Ciafardone, L'Aquila: Ugo Japadre Editore, 1987.

Lorini, Gualtiero, *Fonti e lessico dell'ontologia kantiana. I corsi di Metafisica (1762-1795)*, Pisa: Ets, 2017

Reuter, Peter, *Kants Theorie der Reflexionsbegriffe*, Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1989.

Rivero, Gabriel, *Zur Bedeutung des Begriffs Ontologie bei Kant. Eine Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014.

Rumore, Paola, *L'ordine delle idee. La genesi del concetto di 'rappresentazione' in Kant attraverso le sue fonti wolffiane (1747-1787)*, Firenze: Le Lettere, 2007.

Sala, Giovanni B., *Der reale verstandesgebrauch in der Inauguraldissertation Kants von 1770*, "Kant-Studien" 69, 1978.

Tonelli, Giorgio, *Die Umwälzung von 1769 bei Kant*, "Kant-Studien", 54, 1963.

_____, *Da Leibniz a Kant. Saggi sul pensiero del Settecento*, a cura di C. Cesa, Napoli: Prismi, 1987.

Wundt, Max, *Kant als Metaphysiker. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Philosophie im 18. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart: F. Enke, 1924

Zöller, Günter, "From Innate to A Priori: Kant's Radical Transformation of a Cartesian-Leibnizian Legacy", *The Monist*, 2, 72, 1989, pp. 222-235.

NOTAS / NOTES

¹ Giulio Goria is *Research fellow* of theoretical philosophy at University Vita-Salute San Raffaele, Milan. His primary research fields are classical German idealism, Kant and Hegel in particular, and the issue of philosophical method from the mid-17th to the 20th century. He also has a long-standing interest in Italian political and juridical thought. He is the author of *Il fenomeno e il rimando* (2014) and the editor of "Diritto. L'invenzione della forma", *Il pensiero* (2/2019).

²It is worth note that in *Träume* the nature of metaphysics is already intended in a negative sense, as the "science of the *limits of human reason*", Tr, AA 2, p. 368, p. 354. About the priority of methodological problem see Hinske, 1987, pp. 111-115.

³About the *great light*, see Refl. 5037, AA 16, p. 69. Among the many interpretations, there is M. Wundt who chose to insist on the link between the great light and the problem of antinomies, see Wundt, 1924, p. 160; in contrast, Giorgio Tonelli emphasized that the revolution (*die Umwälzung*) of 1769 had its crux in the separation between sensibility and intellect, see Tonelli, 1963, pp. 369-375. On this point, see Agostini, 2014, pp. 199-205.

⁴An example of these tensions is given by Manfred Baum, who discerns in the *Dissertatio* a considerable residue of dogmatism, shown in the absence of full and conscious delimitation between sensitive and intellectual activity. The main evidence of this lack of *Grenzziehung* is the real use of the intellect intended as the possibility of accessing things in themselves; see Baum, 2019, p. 174.

⁵V-Lo/Philippi, AA 24, p. 446.

⁶ See Refl. 2834. To this general meaning of reflection, the specific logical reflection is connected as one of the acts that make up the process of forming the concept.

⁷ Log, AA 9, p. 76, p. 579.

⁸ In addition to this meaning of reflection, we can also see one, also found in the *Corpus* of Kant's logic that refers mainly to the faculty of cognition (*Erkenntnisstärke*); on this distinction see. Heßbrüggen-Walter, 2004, p. 156.

⁹ Henrich, 1989, p. 43.

¹⁰ See Reuter, 1989, p. 74 et seq.

¹¹ It was G. Sala who interpreted the concepts of the intellect as the result of the spontaneity of the activity of the intellect and, as such, as anticipations of pure categories; see Sala, 1978, pp. 6-10.

¹² Here Kant states that “the form of things in space and time” and “the synthetic unity of the manifold in concepts” are “original acquisition” (Entdeckung, AA 8, p. 221, p. 135). This notion of original acquisition effectively marks the distance from the idea, which originated from Leibniz, that there may be ideas or representations present in the intellect before some awareness of them; but it also differs from the empiricist approach according to which every idea or representation has its origin in the senses; see Zöllner, 1989, pp. 228-9 and Rumore, 2007, pp. 231-226.

¹³ See *Dissertatio*, AA 2, p. 397, p. 388.

¹⁴ G. Rivero, *Zur Bedeutung des Begriffs Ontologie bei Kant. Eine Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, De Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2014, pp. 139-148.

¹⁵ For an in-depth discussion of this point, see Lorini, 2017, p. 188-89.

¹⁶ On this point, M. Grier underscored the distinction between the two kinds of mistakes, suggesting simple subreption as a problem of “sensualizing an intellect concept” while the metaphysical one as “intellectualizing phenomena”, see Grier, 2004, pp. 60-1; it should be noted, however, that although the passage allows for this differentiation, converging for both senses in a single kind of surreptitious axiom, the rest of the text no longer mentions it, identifying instead a triple classification of the “illusions of sensible cognition, which masquerade under the guise of cognitions of the understanding”, see *Dissertatio*, AA 2, 413, p. 409.

¹⁷ V-Lo/Blomberg, AA 24, p. 255, p. 203. For a complete overview of the concept of *subreption* in all of Kant's thought see Birken-Bertsch, 2006, who also considers this to be the key concept of *Dissertatio*, (pp. 76-93).

¹⁸ See Allison, 2004, pp. 324-26. On this subject, see also Bird, 2004, pp. 411-413.

Recebido / Received: 14 dezembro 2020 / 14 December 2020.

Aceito / Accepted: 24 dezembro 2020 / 24 December 2020.

<https://doi.org/10.36311/2318-0501.2020.v8n2.04.p37>

