

KANT'S CONFRONTATION WITH PLATO AND THE GREEK WORLD IN THE *INAUGURAL DISSERTATION*¹

Gualtiero LORINI²

1. PREMISE: KANT'S *CRITICAL HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY*

A great deal has been written about Kant's relationship with classical Greek thought, from very diverse perspectives and with different aims. For this reason, it is necessary to clarify that in this contribution we will confine our analysis to some topics linked to this relation, which recur in the *Dissertation* of 1770 and that can therefore contribute to the emergence of the methodological shift announced but not resolved in this dense text. It is from this systematic point of view that the following pages should be read, and therefore not as advancing wide-ranging theses on the extent and nature of the influence of Greek thought on the rise of Kantian Criticism. The very notion of "Greek thought" itself, not to mention its reception in 18th century Germany, presents such a multitude of facets that it will be appropriate to assume a limiting guiding thread. Thus, in what follows Kant's main interlocutor will be Plato, without however excluding some elements beyond the Athenian philosopher, which in any case fall within what we can define as "Kantian Platonism".

Despite these premises, it is however unavoidable to depart from a general methodological consideration. Kant's relation with Greek thought is a topic characterized by objective historical limits, first and foremost Kant's inability, for linguistic reasons, to confront himself directly with ancient Greek texts, hence his well-documented need to approach these texts through the filter of works such as, in Plato's case, J. J. Brucker's *Historia critica*.³ However, this does not prevent Kant from claiming a certain autonomy of judgement, and

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Brucker's case can be mentioned in this respect. In Book I of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, in fact, when Kant quotes Brucker's work (this is the only occurrence in the Kantian corpus) referring to Plato's *Republic*, he disagrees with him about the uselessness and chimerical nature of this Platonic model, which, according to the German historian, would be 'ideal' only because it is unrealistic.⁴

This very clear stance in relation to the interpretation of a text to which Kant could not have direct access is very revealing of the hermeneutic attitude adopted by Kant in relation to his sources (more or less direct). It is precisely in reference to the Platonic concept of 'idea' that Kant, in the same pages where he criticizes Brucker, explicitly states that "when we compare the thoughts that an author expresses about a subject, in ordinary speech as well as in writing, it is not at all unusual to find that we understand him even better than he understood himself, since he may not have determined his concept sufficiently and hence sometimes spoke, or even thought, contrary to his own intention" (KrV A 314/B 370, tr. 396).

This methodological statement is consistent with at least three elements that hold as a long-term trend in Kant's thinking. The first one deals with Kant's lectures on Logic, Metaphysics, and the Philosophical Encyclopedia (as well as the *Reflexionen* that refer to it) from the 1760s onwards. The exposition of the history of philosophy which normally precedes some of these courses tends to marginalize Eastern philosophy in favor of Greek philosophy. At the root of this state of affairs there is Kant's increasing departure from the scheme of "philosophical sects" in favor of an approach oriented to the strategies employed by the various currents of ancient Greek thought in order to face the philosophical problems they are confronted with⁵.

The second methodological guideline can be seen as a development of the first one. Indeed, this way of presenting the history of thought can be recovered at the end of the *Doctrine of Method* of the first *Critique*. The fourth and last chapter of this section consists precisely of *The History of Pure Reason*, which Kant conceives of not as a mere archaeological exercise, but as "a place that is left open in the system and must be filled in the future" (KrV A 852/B 880, tr. 702). The proof of this conception of the history of pure reason – for which the critical revolution certainly marked a turning point, but which still remains to be written – is that the reconstruction of the stages that led to the present situation is not chronological but thematic. Kant identifies indeed "three points of view on which the most notable changes on this stage of conflict [metaphysics] have been founded" (KrV A 853/B 881, tr. 702). These points of

view are articulated according to the *object of rational knowledge*, its *origin* and the *method* followed by the philosophers who have contributed most to the renewal of metaphysics. This approach allows Kant to count Plato among the “intellectual philosophers” as far as the object of rational knowledge is concerned, and among the “noologists” as far as its origin is concerned (KrV A 853-844/B 881-882, tr. 702-703).

Finally, and this is the third feature that we aim to outline, in the *Löse Blätter* on the late writing concerning the *Progress of Metaphysics*, Kant speaks of a “Philosophizing History of Philosophy” and, in accordance with the pronouncements that we have just analyzed, he states that

a historical presentation of philosophy recounts how philosophizing has been done hitherto, and in what order. But philosophizing is a gradual development of human reason, and this cannot have set forth, or even have begun, upon the empirical path, and that by mere concepts. There must have been a need of reason (theoretical or practical) which obliged it to ascend from its judgments about things to the grounds thereof, up to the first, initially through common reason (FM/Löse Blätter, AA 20: 340-341, tr. 417).

Therefore, Kant adds that although a philosophical history of reason “establishes facts of reason, it does not borrow them from historical narrative, but draws them from the nature of human reason, as philosophical archaeology” (FM/Löse Blätter, AA 20: 341, tr. 417).

Accordingly, the only “archaeology” allowed in the history of philosophy is a philosophical archaeology, that is, an approach shaped by the life of reason itself, which is neither exhausted by nor resolved in its contingent manifestation. This premise is necessary in order to understand both the meaning, the limits and also the potentialities of the way Kant relates to Greek thought, in particular to Plato, in the somehow enigmatic and challenging *Dissertation* of 1770. It will therefore now be a question of trying to understand what problems Kant was dealing with at this crucial moment in his theoretical path and how the Greek world, or rather the image that Kant himself had formed of it, plays a role in the outline of these problems and in Kant’s attempt to solve them.

2. KANT’S “PLATONISM” IN THE *DISSERTATION* AND ITS LIMITS

According to the current interpretation – which from Wundt and Reich reaches Vieillard-Baron and Nuzzo⁶ (to confine ourselves to a few names) – Kant’s *Dissertation* of 1770

constitutes the crucial moment of his (indirect, as we have just shown) “encounter” with Plato. Wundt goes so far as to suggest that Kant refers to his discovery of Plato in the famous *Reflexion* 5037 (1776-1778), where he talks about the “great light” that invested him in 1769.⁷ On the other hand, Reich rather sees in M. Mendelssohn’s *Phaedon* (1767) the text that would have provoked the “awakening” of Platonic echoes in Kant during these crucial years for the determination of critical issues⁸.

The decisive reason for the emergence of these interpretations is represented by the conceptual structure underlying the main division that Kant illustrates already in the title of the work, namely that between the sensible and the intelligible world. Since § 3 of the *Dissertation* – devoted precisely to *De sensibilibus atque intelligibilibus discrimine generatim* – this division reveals to be linked to that between phenomena and noumena:

The object of sensibility is sensible; that which contains nothing but what is to be cognized through the intelligence is intelligible. In the schools of the ancients, the former was called *phenomenon* and the latter *noumenon* (MSI, AA 02: 392, tr. 384).

However, in this passage, as in the subsequent elaboration of this distinction, not only is Plato not mentioned, but no ancient author or ancient school is explicitly addressed. Yet Kant’s reference to antiquity is clear, so the question about his ideal interlocutor or interlocutors is quite legitimately raised. First of all, we have to observe that the Kantian reference in these lines cannot be Plato, which we can argue by considering how he places the sensible and intelligible worlds in relation to each other. As early as the first paragraph, devoted to the notion of the world in general, Kant states that he examined the “*two-fold genesis*” of this concept as it arises “*e mentis natura*” (MSI, AA 02: 387, tr. 377):

Thus, 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, as one might do with some problem of reason, by the sensitive⁹ faculty of cognition, that is to say, to represent the same concept to oneself in the concrete by a distinct intuition. The former is done [...] by means of ideas of the understanding which are universal. The latter case rests upon the *conditions* of time, in so far as it is possible, by the successive addition of part to part, to arrive genetically, that is to say, by SYNTHESIS, at the concept of a compound; this case falls under the laws of *intuition* (MSI, AA 02: 387, tr. 377-378).

Still in the first paragraph, Kant explicitly states that “this lack of accord between the *sensitive* faculty and the faculty of the *understanding* [...] points only to the fact that *the abstracts*

ideas which the mind [mens] entertains when they have been received from the understanding very often cannot be followed up in the concrete and converted into intuition" (MSI, AA 02: 389, tr. 379). The two worlds, therefore, are not subordinate to one another, but rather correspond to two different ways of looking at reality. In this context, we should be careful not to fall into the *vitium subreptionis* denounced by Kant in the fifth and last section of the text, from which emerge the surreptitious axioms¹⁰. Throughout the first part of the *Dissertation*, Kant very thoroughly pursues this parallelism between the two worlds. From paragraph 4 to 6, he specifies that "things that are thought sensitively [*sensitive cogitata*] are representations of things *as they appear*, while things which are intellectual [*intellectualia*] are representations of things *as they are*" (MSI, AA 02: 392, tr. 384). On this basis, however, Kant does not establish a hierarchy between these two types of knowledge, he rather situates each of them in correspondence with as many uses of understanding. On the one hand, by means of the logical use of the understanding, common to all sciences:

the concepts, no matter whence they are given, are merely subordinated to each other, the lower, namely, to the higher (common characteristic marks), and compared with one another in accordance with the principle of contradiction [...] If, therefore, sensitive cognitions are given, sensitive cognitions are subordinated by the logical use of the understanding to other sensitive cognitions, as to common concepts, and phenomena are subordinated to more general laws of phenomena" (MSI, AA 02: 393, tr. 385)¹¹.

On the other hand, by means of the real use of the understanding "the concepts themselves, whether of things or relations, *are given*" (MSI, AA 02: 393, tr. 385). This usage, which – unlike logical usage – is not common to all sciences, concerns the "intellectualia strictetalia": "such concepts, whether of objects or of relations, are given by the very nature of the understanding: they contain no form of sensitive cognition and they have been abstracted from no use of the senses", since – as Kant points out – "to abstract from something" presupposes an original mixture of the two elements, whereas the intellectual concept "abstracts" and is not "abstracted from" everything sensible, so that "perhaps a concept of the understanding would more rightly be called *abstracting* than abstracted" (MSI, AA 02: 394, tr. 386). Furthermore, in order to dispel any doubts about a subordinate position of sensible knowledge, at the beginning of § 11 Kant expressly declares: "Now, although phenomena, properly speaking are aspects of things [*rerum species*] and not ideas, and although they do not express the internal and absolute quality of objects, nonetheless cognition of them is in the highest degree true" (MSI, AA 02: 397, tr. 389).

To sum up, we have, on the one hand, the intelligible world, obtained per *notionem abstractam intellectus*. This is the world of analysis, characterized by a totality of simple parts, known in themselves by means of the real use of understanding and coordinated with each other. The peculiarity of this world consists in its *abstracting* character in relation to the sensible world, a character essentially linked to its universal and ideal nature. Next to the intelligible world, but not subordinated to it, there is the sensible world, namely the world of synthesis, a concrete world grounded upon intuition. Here the simple parts as such are never given, but are rather always and only placed into relations enabled by space and time. Such a state of affairs allows room for the logical use of understanding to subordinate sensible knowledges to other sensible knowledges. This has led various interpreters – such as Tonelli, Popkin and Laursen, Patt, Höffe¹² and above all Ferrari – to contrast with those, mentioned above, who believed the distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal world to represent a reference to Plato. Ferrari is quite clear in this respect: “yet whereas, for the tradition stemming from Plato, the sensible is a source of errors and illusions, for Kant it becomes, through its a priori form, a place of truth with its own clarity and distinction: space and time make it possible to account for the existence of geometry and the development of mathematics” (Ferrari 1989: 67).

To be sure, given Kant’s indirect knowledge of Plato, he may have had a distorted view of the Platonic perspective to the extent that he could have ignored the fundamental hierarchy between the intelligible and the sensible dimension placed at the basis of Plato’s thought. This would lead us to believe that Kant’s model, in this conception of the distinction between the two worlds, as well as of the resulting distinction between phenomena and noumena, is indeed Plato, albeit an apocryphal Plato. Yet this does not seem to be the case for at least two reasons:

Firstly, already in those years Kant was well aware of the pre-eminence of the intelligible element over the sensible element in Plato. This emerges, for example, in the *Reflexion* 1636, which we have mentioned above, in which he refers of the Ionic, Eleatic and Italian schools, respectively, as advocates of pure rationalism, whose «Magnus defensor» would be Plato. In a context which undoubtedly recalls the theory of ideas, Kant claims about Plato that “Intelligibile oppositum sensibili” (see: Refl 1636, AA 16: 60).

Secondly, U. Santozki, among others, has convincingly shown that, as far as the non-hierarchical consideration of the two worlds is concerned, Kant’s ancient source would probably be the Sceptics, whom Kant knew indirectly through the mediation of J. Regius¹³, J.

Carpov¹⁴, J. J. Brucker and A. G. Baumgarten. Santozki suggests that Baumgarten in particular provided a decisive contribution to accrediting Sextus Empiricus' Platonism. This latter transmitted indeed to modernity an image of Plato for whom sensible and intelligible knowledges were not situated on clearly distinguished hierarchical levels¹⁵. Actually, in his reading of Plato, Sextus Empiricus attributes to the perceptive plane of the *aisthesis* a primitive representative capacity able to produce a complete knowledge. The objects of this knowledge are the *aisthetà* (the *sensibilia*), which, as products of a representation, can be considered as phenomena. Sensible knowledges characterized in this way would therefore not be sharply subordinate to intelligible knowledges (the *noetà*), but rather, between *aisthetà* and *noetà* there would be a path of progressive clarification, namely that of the *doxa*. By accrediting this interpretation, Baumgarten would thus have established an undue affinity between Plato and the Leibniz-Wolffian school, an affinity that would be functional to the conceptual framework of his *Aesthetics*.

We do not know whether Kant was familiar with Baumgarten's texts in which this interpretation is explicit – it is indeed matter of a lecture-course¹⁶ and a dissertation published by a pupil of Baumgarten after the master's death.¹⁷ In any case, one cannot avoid observing that a connection between Leibniz and Plato, stated with polemical accents, is still present in Kant's *Anthropology*.¹⁸ Furthermore, Kant could certainly have found the Baumgartenian distinction between *aisthetà* and *noetà*, very well expressed and in reference to unspecified "ancient philosophers", in Baumgarten's *Meditationes de nunnallis ad poema pertinentibus* (1735):

Already the Greek philosophers and the Fathers of the Church always carefully distinguished between *αἰσθητά* and *νοητά*, and it is quite clear that the *αἰσθητά* for them were not equivalent only to sensible things, because also things perceived as absent (and therefore images) deserve this name. Let *νοητά*, then, which have to be known by the higher faculty, be the object of logic; and let the *αἰσθητά* be the object of *ἐπιστήμης αἰσθητικῆς*, that is, of aesthetics.¹⁹

It goes without saying that the terms in which the distinction is made here echoes not only what is set out in the *Dissertation*, but also, and perhaps even more explicitly, what Kant will contend in the first *Critique* by openly rejecting what Baumgarten understands with the term "aesthetics".²⁰

Even assuming, therefore, that the model for the separation between the two worlds in

the *Dissertation* is not Plato but the Skeptics, one must in any case examine those passages of the text in which Kant doubtless thinks of Plato, a Plato not so far from the original. There are two passages in this regard: the first and most significant is located in § 9, where Kant, in defining the “dogmatic” aim of intellectual knowledge – which consists in drawing the exemplary model represented by the “noumenic perfection” – identifies two meanings of this perfection: the first, theoretical, coincides with “the Supreme Being, God”, whereas the second is practical and consists in the *perfectio moralis* (MSI, AA 02: 396, tr. 388). Epicurus and Shaftesbury are criticized here for identifying the *principia diiudicandi* of moral philosophy with sensible elements such as “the sense of pleasure or pain” (MSI, AA 02: 396, tr. 388). With regard to the second interlocutor, Kant reconsiders at least partially the favorable opinion he had expressed with regard to these moral theories – also in relation to Hutcheson and Hume – in the *Deutlichkeit* and *Nachricht* of 1765-66²¹. In these lines Plato is clearly evoked in relation to the *maximum* of moral perfection:

In any genus of things, the quantity of which is variable, the *maximum* is the common measure and principle of cognizing. The *maximum of perfection* is nowadays called the ideal, while for Plato it was called the idea (as in the case of his idea of the state). It is the principle of all things which are contained under the general concept of some perfection (MSI, AA 02: 396, tr. 388).

Here, the reference to Plato is motivated by Kant’s aim to stress that moral principles must be completely detached from experience. Kant looks for *principia diiudicandi*, i.e., criteria for establishing the morality of action: in other words, criteria that make it possible to “measure” the value of action from a horizon that is by definition inaccessible. Kant qualifies such a horizon as *ideal* and openly superimposes this concept on the Platonic *idea*, but in the critical phase the relation between *ideal* and *idea* will be more accurately outlined.

The Platonic idea so understood is, of course, inaccessible for a finite subject, and in its most extreme form it will later be criticized because of the mystical drifts it is exposed to. However, what counts for Kant in this context is not its character of intellectual intuition – evoked *en passant* in § 25²² –, but rather its non-empirical character – which makes it still potentially knowable, although only by a divine understanding. Such a non-empirical character makes a so conceived idea an adequate instrument of “moral measurement”. Accordingly, one may conclude with Jean Ferrari that: “The Platonic theory of ideas, freed of its metaphysical illusions, opens the way and calls for the critical solution that defines the idea as a concept of reason, that is to say, a representation that arises from the application of a demand for

unconditioned to a notion of understanding” (Ferrari 1989: 70).

3. THE COMPOSITION OF THE TWO WORLDS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The Kantian conception of the history of philosophy that we set out at the beginning of this paper can now help us to scrutinize how the Platonic influences, or supposedly such, detected in the most important topics of the *Dissertation* should be assessed. To do so, we have to ask ourselves what problems Kant is dealing with at this time. Some relevant elements in this sense can be detected in the very last section of the *Dissertation*, which is devoted to the “*method in metaphysics concerning what is sensitive and what belongs to the understanding [sensitiva et intellectualia]*” (MSI, AA 02: 410). As we anticipated, this section warns against the risk of taking sensible elements of knowledge as intellectual elements. However, as Kant will openly acknowledge shortly afterwards in the famous letter to Herz of February 21, 1772, this leaves in the shadow a crucial question for human knowledge, as well as for the metaphysics supposedly grounding it, namely: the question of the adequacy between representation and its object. The objectivity of knowledge rests indeed precisely on this adequacy. The intelligible world, as Kant accounts for it in 1770, does not provide any answer to this question, since the objects of this world, the *intellectualia*, in so far as they are “abstracting” from sensibility, “must not be abstracted from sense perceptions [*Empfindungen der Sinne*], nor must they express the reception of representations through the senses; but though they must have their origin in the nature of the soul, they are neither caused by the object nor do they bring the object itself into being” (Br, AA 10: 130, tr. 133). In his letter to Herz, Kant explicitly acknowledges the limits of his 1770 perspective:

In my dissertation I was content to explain the nature of intellectual representations in a merely negative way, namely, to state that they were not modifications of the soul [*Seele*] brought about by the object. However, I silently passed over the further question of how a representation that refers to an object without being in any way affected by it can be possible (Br, AA 10: 130-131, tr. 133).

From the perspective sketched out in the *Dissertation*, the problem of the adequacy of representations is reflected in the need to find a composition between the two worlds, a composition which, without generating confusion between them, can guarantee the legitimacy by which it can be defended that the “faculty of the understanding” [*Verstandesvermögen*] conforms to those, which in the letter to Herz are still defined as “*Dinge selbst*” (Br, AA 10: 131, tr. 134). Yet this composition can only be reached by overcoming the clear dichotomy that still separates the two types of knowledge of each world in the *Dissertation*: intuitive

knowledge for the *mundus sensibilis* and symbolic knowledge for the *mundus intelligibilis*.²³

Here we cannot reconstruct all the passages of the path that leads Kant to identify the discursive character of conceptual knowledge and, consequently, to oppose symbolic knowledge no more to intuitive knowledge, but to discursive knowledge itself. It suffices to recall that this path certainly begins in the 1770s, at the time of the anthropology- and metaphysics-lectures carried out by Kant on the basis of Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*.²⁴ On the one hand, Kant follows Baumgarten in considering intuitive knowledge and symbolic knowledge as two different levels of adherence of the sign to the signatum, and on the other, he emphasizes the special character of discursive knowledge. Indeed, against the practice, diffused in the Leibniz-Wolffian school, of defining as "symbolic" the knowledge employing signs, which relies on words²⁵, Kant claims that "Intuition is not opposed to the symbolic, but to the cognition through concepts. The symbolic representation rather serves to intuition. [...] Words are not *symbola*, for they do not provide any image".²⁶

As is well known, this is a decisive position for the critical turn, i.e., for the determination of the nature of the categories conceived of as discursive *Verstandesbegriffe* – a position which will have significant echoes also in the *Third Critique*²⁷ and which, still in polemics with the Leibniz-Wolffian tradition, will be strongly recalled in the writing against Eberhard.²⁸

However, in order to assess Kant's relationship with Plato, we need to orient our attention elsewhere. Indeed, once established the legitimacy by which discursive knowledge can, or better yet, *cannot but* transcendently refer to sensibility, without being determined by it, Kant can recover the positive value of the Platonic perspective not only at the practical but also at the theoretical level. The ambiguous nature of the 1770 *intellectualia* is certainly resolved in the sense of the conceptuality of categories, but the requirement of an unconditioned dimension, totally detached from the sensible level, survives in the form of ideas as Kant describes them at the beginning of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, in the paragraph devoted to the *Ideas in General*:

Plato made use of the expression idea in such a way that we can readily see that he understood by it something that not only could never be borrowed from the senses, but that even goes far beyond the concepts of the understanding (with which Aristotle occupied himself), since nothing encountered in experience could ever be congruent to it. Ideas for him are archetypes [*Urbilder*] of things themselves, and not, like the categories, merely the key to possible experiences (KrV, A 313/B 370, tr. 395).

These archetypes express the need for a higher-level unity, targeted to determine "the

use of the understanding according to principles in the whole of an entire experience” (KrV, A 321/B 378, tr. 399), as Kant will argue later in the paragraph on *Transcendental Ideas*, thereby introducing the distinction between concepts of understanding – categories – and concepts of reason [*Vernunftbegriffe*], the latter corresponding precisely to the transcendental ideas. In contrast to the letter to Herz, in which the *Vernunftbegriffe* also had a general meaning, this expression now assumes a specifically technical meaning thanks to the internal articulation of the *Transcendental Logic* into *Analytics* and *Dialectics*.

An effective element of comparison in this sense is represented by the *Metaphysik Dobna* (a metaphysics lecture-course from the early 1790s), where we can appreciate the distinction between pure intellectual concepts [*reine Verstandesbegriffe*], to which an object of experience can correspond, and the *Ideen* “for which no object of experience can be adequate”.²⁹ The pure concepts of understanding and the ideas are associated, respectively, to an immanent use of understanding and to a transcendent use of reason³⁰. However, in spite of this distinction, both pure concepts of understanding and ideas fall under the *Notionen*³¹, as Kant calls them in this course by borrowing the Latin word *notio*, a technical term used by the *Schulmetaphysik* in order to designate the “concept”. The *Notionen* that express *Ideen* are nothing more than those particular concepts of reason that in the above-mentioned section entitled *On Ideas in general* Kant designated through the only two occurrences of the German term *Notion* in the entire *Critique of Pure Reason*.³²

Thus, looking back to the problematic framework of the *Dissertation*, we can claim that with the critical turn Kant established a new systematic articulation between the *mundus sensibilis* and the *mundus intelligibilis*, and that this articulation is represented by discursive conceptuality. This conceptuality cooperates with the sensible dimension to determine possible experience and is delimited in its application by transcendental ideas. However, in this modified framework, the “top-down” delimitation is not simply negative. Indeed, alongside the resumption of the polemic against “moral empiricism”, which was already well defined in the *Dissertation*, Kant strongly claims the non-chimeric but positive nature of the idea conceived of in Plato’s fashion:

Plato noted very well that our power of cognition feels a far higher need than that of merely spelling out appearances according to a synthetic unity in order to be able to read them as experience, and that our reason naturally exalts itself to cognitions that go much too far for any object that experience can give ever to be congruent, but that nonetheless have their reality and are by no means merely figments of the brain (KrV, A 314/B 370-371, tr. 396).

In this sense, Kant goes even further, by claiming that “But Plato was right to see clear

proofs of an origin in ideas not only where human reason shows true causality, and where ideas become efficient causes (of actions and their objects), namely in morality, but also in regard to nature itself” (KrV, A 317/B 374, tr. 397). Hence some considerations stem, which closely allude to the criticism of teleological judgment as set out in the third *Critique*: “A plant, an animal, the regular arrangement of the world’s structure [...] these show clearly that they are possible only according to ideas” (KrV, A 317-318/B 374, tr. 397). And, even if no individual creature is suitable for this idea, in the highest understanding each idea is unique, immutable, completely determined and holds as the original cause of things, so that: “only the whole of their combination in the totality of a world is fully adequate to that idea” (KrV, A 317-318/B 374-375, tr. 398 slightly modified).

Kant further explains that the Platonic idea, in his interpretation, could concretely and positively serve as a principle for the knowledge of nature, even if it fulfils an essentially regulatory task. To this end, Kant refers to another concept already mentioned in the *Dissertation*, namely that of the *ideal*, which is taken up here in terms close to but more precise than those of 1770:

What I call the *ideal*, by which I understand the idea not merely *in concreto* but *in individuo*, i.e., as an individual thing which is determinable, or even determined, by the thing alone (KrV, A 568/B 596, tr. 551).

With respect to the *Dissertation*, we no longer have a substitution of the Platonic *idea* with the *ideal*, but rather Kant elaborates a distinction between these two concepts. In the words of Alberto Siani: “The idea [...] constitutes the foundation for the determination of the ideal, which in turn represents the complete and perfect model – precisely because it is an ‘individualized’ entity – for the determination of what is possible or can be evaluated on the basis of it” (Siani 2007: 83). In this regard, Kant points out that:

What is an ideal to us, was to Plato an *idea in the divine understanding*, an individual object in that understanding’s pure intuition, the most perfect thing of each species of possible beings and the original ground of all copies in appearance. [...] Thus just as the idea gives the rule, so the ideal in such a case serves as the original image [*Urbilde*] for the thoroughgoing determination of the copy (KrV, A 568-569/B 596-597, tr. 551-552).

It is hard not to recognize in this characterization of the ideal the measuring function that in 1770 Kant had already ascribed to it in relation to moral action.

4. FINAL REMARKS

It should be quite clear by now that Plato is not the decisive reason for the fundamental theoretical changes that took place between the *Dissertation* of 1770 and the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, the different and increasingly significant way in which Kant can make use of doctrines which, according to him, can be traced back more or less faithfully to Plato, represents a good example of how the history of philosophy – in this case of ancient philosophy – penetrates into Kant's architectural project, according to the methodological lines that we have sketched in the first section of this paper.

It is apparent that Kant cannot follow Plato in what he sees as dogmatic and “enthusiastic” drifts. Yet Kant grasps the Greek philosopher's spirit of the system, which he revives within his own systematic difficulties, while finding reasons for a renewed confrontation in the light of the sharp turns that he gives to his own thinking. Beyond the limits represented by Kant's indirect knowledge of Plato, in the relationship he established with the Greek philosopher on the topics that we have analyzed in this article, we can recognize the meaning of the famous *Reflexion* 2159, according to which “when one wants to be an inventor, [he/she] wants to be the first, but if one only wants the truth, one would like to have predecessors” (Refl 2159 AA 16: 255).

Yet Plato, seen as Kant's predecessor, is not a giant on whose shoulders Kant would try to climb, since this would presuppose both exact direct knowledge and, consequently, the recognition of a clear authority with regard to the addressed issue. In Kant's texts, Plato appears rather as an explorer who has taken certain paths, along which Kant watches at every occasion whether the footsteps are heading in the right direction. In this sense, Jean Ferrari's words seem once again enlightening, and the best way to conclude: “Kant has a real interest in Plato only insofar either as he believes to discover in the latter's philosophy the premises of his own doctrine, or because Plato, even by his very errors, is part of a history of reason which shows ‘the critical step’ as the accomplishment of philosophy” (Ferrari 1989: 74).

In support of this, one can mention a remark, made almost *en passant*, but which renders very effectively Kant's respectful but certainly fearless attitude towards his predecessors. It is a note in the writing against Eberhard, where Kant, ironizing on the blind dogmatism with which his adversary defends Leibniz's positions, argues that philosophy cannot be put on the level of grammar. Indeed, “if it ever occurred to anyone to rebuke Cicero because he did not

write good Latin, then some Scioppius (a grammarian reputed for his zeal) would put him pretty firmly, though properly, in his place; for *what constitutes good Latin* we can learn only from Cicero (and his contemporaries)". The same does not go for philosophy, since "if anyone believed himself to have found an error in Plato's or Leibniz's philosophy, indignation that there should even be something to criticize in Leibniz would be ridiculous". Beyond the juxtaposition of Plato and Leibniz, which we have already discussed, the reason that pushes Kant to justify an objection even against a great thinker of the past is here relevant: "*What is philosophically correct* – adds Kant – neither can nor should be learned from Leibniz; rather the touchstone, which lies equally to hand for one man as for another, is common human reason". The continually renewed challenge that every philosopher faces along his or her long research path depends indeed on the fact that "there are no *classical authors* in philosophy" (ÜE, AA 8: 219n, tr. 309).

Abstract: The discussion concerning Kant's knowledge of the Greek world has long been a subject of debate. Our contribution is intended to show that in the *Dissertation* of 1770 Kant is measured against some currents of Greek thought, and above all with Plato, on topics which will become very important in the articulated development of criticism in the 1770s. One aspect of our analysis deals with the texts that could have filtered Kant's knowledge of ancient Greek tradition. We will then pore over some crucial features of the *Dissertation*, such as the distinction between sensible and intelligible knowledge and the ambiguous nature of the *intellectualia*, in order to assess how Kant's understanding of certain issues of Greek classicism may have contributed to the outline of some still problematic theses in the text of 1770.

Keywords: Greek Tradition, Platonism, Sensible and Intelligible World, Idea-Ideal, Phenomena-Noumena.

Resumo: A discussão sobre o conhecimento do mundo grego por parte de Kant é há muito tempo objecto de debate. A nossa contribuição pretende mostrar que na *Dissertação* de 1770 Kant se confronta com algumas correntes do pensamento grego, e sobretudo com Platão, sobre tópicos que se tornarão muito importantes no desenvolvimento articulado do criticismo na década de 1770. Um aspecto da nossa análise diz respeito aos textos que poderiam ter filtrado o conhecimento de Kant sobre a antiga tradição grega. Depois, analisaremos algumas características cruciais da *Dissertação*, como por exemplo a distinção entre conhecimento sensível e inteligível e a natureza ambígua dos *intellectualia*, a fim de avaliar como a compreensão de Kant de certas questões do classicismo grego pode ter contribuído para o esboço de algumas teses ainda problemáticas no texto de 1770.

Palavras-chave: Tradição Grega, Platonismo, Mundo Sensível e Inteligível, Idea-Ideal, Fenomena-Noumena.

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UD: *Inquiry concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural theology and Morality*

NEV: *M. Immanuel Kant's Announcement of the Programme of His Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765-1766.*

FM: *What Real Progress has Metaphysics made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?*

KrV: *Critique of Pure Reason, translated and edited by P. Guyer and A. Wood, Cambridge: CUP, 1998.*

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NOTAS / NOTES

¹ This essay originates from a talk delivered in October 2019 at the 14th Congress of the Société d'Études Kantienne de Langue Française (SEKLF) in Athens. A French version of this paper will be published soon in the proceedings volume (Paris: Vrin).

² Gualtiero Lorini (Alexander von Humboldt Alumnus) is Assistant Professor of Theoretical Philosophy at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan. His main research areas are German Enlightenment, Kant's philosophy, with a particular focus on metaphysics and anthropology, German idealism, as well as the relation between Neo-Kantianism and Phenomenology. Together with R.B. Loudon he is the editor of *Knowledge, Morals and Practice in Kant's Anthropology*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. He edited the first Italian translation of A.G. Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*, to be published soon (Milano-Firenze: Bompiani-Giunti).

³ J.J. Brucker, *Historia critica philosophiae a mundi incunabulis ad nostram usque aetatem deducta*, 5 voll., Lipsiae: Breitkopf, 1741-1744.

⁴ KrV A 316/B 372.

⁵ Cfr. Refl. 1635, AA 16: 56-58 (1752-1755/1756) contrasted with Refl. 1636, AA 16: 60 (1760-1772). On these points see: Micheli 1980: 60-61, 269.

⁶ See: Wundt 1924: 162, 428; Mollowitz 1935: 41; Reich 1935: 23; Heimsoeth 1965: 349-372 and 1967: 125; Vieillard-Baron 1979: 41; Nuzzo 2003: 43-44, 48; and the references to these studies in Santozki 2006: 57, nn. 110-111.

⁷ Refl 5037, AA 18: 69 (1776-1778). See also: Wundt 1924: 153-178.

⁸ See: Reich 1935: 15.

⁹ As a general norm, and in accordance with the adopted English translation of the *Dissertation*, the term *sensibilis* is rendered here as “sensible” and the term *sensitivus* as “sensitive”. In non-technical contexts I prefer to employ the term “sensible”.

¹⁰ MSI, AA 02: 412-417.

¹¹ On the contrast between coordination and subordination, see also what Kant points out describing the general characters of the concept of form as one of the components characterizing the concept of *mundus generatim*.

¹² See: Tonelli 1967: 96-97; Laursen-Popkin 1998: 262; Patt 1997: 15, 18, 35n.; Höffe 2003: 51.

¹³ J. Regius, *Oratio pro scepticismo*, Franequerae: Halma, 1725.

¹⁴ J. Carпов, *Idealismus ex concessis explosus*, Vinariae: Litteris Mumbachianis, 1740. For both the reference to Carпов and the preceding to Regius, see: Tonelli 1967: 97, n. 25 and U. Santozki 2006: 64, n. 130.

¹⁵ See: Sextus Empiricus, *Hypotyposes* I, 8-9; Id., *Adversus Mathematicos*, VII: 141.

¹⁶ See: A.G. Baumgarten, *Kollegium über die Ästhetik*, § 1, in B. Poppe, *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. Seine Bedeutung und Stellung in der Leibniz-Wolffschen Philosophie und seine Beziehungen zu Kant. Nebst Veröffentlichung einer bisher unbekannt Handschrift der Ästhetik Baumgartens*, Leipzig: Noske, 1907, p. 65: “We are willing to systematically present the basic principles of all the beautiful sciences. The whole science is known under the name of aesthetics, and since our textbook needs this word in the first explanation, we must first be concerned with its origin. It actually comes from αἰσθάνομαι; this word denotes what *sentio* denotes in Latin, namely all clear sensations. Since sensations are divided into external and internal, into those that occur in my body as conscious to me and relate to all the senses, or into those that occur only in my soul, so this word, which denotes clear sensations in general, will apply to both. Since, furthermore, the word *sentio* denotes perceiving something sensibly, but the Greek [word] is completely identical with it, so it also denotes sensible representations, and so it is used by Plato, where αἰσθητά are opposed to νοητά [the author notes that it should read νοητοίς, in the dative plural] as indistinct and distinct representations”.

¹⁷ See: Joh. Chr. Förster, *Dissertatio prooemialis de dubitatione et certitudine*, in A.G. Baumgarten, *Philosophia generalis*, Halae Magdeburgicae: Hemmerde, 1770; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1968, § 3: “This is not the place to investigate in more detail the nature of skepticism, and to enumerate the many places of the ancients, so that every circle of those who dealt with Pyrrho and the Pyrrhonians is manifest; it is sufficient merely to say that wherever an ἐποχή is to be posited, they resolved to consider even a dogma as uncertain. They thus had as their goal a certain indifference; and with this they taught themselves not to be indifferent towards that indifference which they praised so much. Above all, they considered that this indifference, called ἀπαράξιν, stems from the fact that the wise man, who rightly considers both sides of things, cannot ignore that for each reason there is an equally great opposite one, so that nowhere is it possible to distinguish between what is true and what is false. I will refer first of all to Sextus Empiricus, where the position of Pyrrho and the skeptics is correctly stated. When Φαινόμενα and νοούμενα are mutually distinguished, as they must, so that those are what is perceived with the senses, while these with the mind and cannot be thought of with the senses, we will so properly have τα νοούμενα opposed to τοῖς Φαινόμενοις, and yet at the same time also the Φαινόμενα will be opposed to the Φαινόμενοις; from here it should also be explained what is so important for the skeptics: παντί λογῷ ἴσως ἀντικεῖται οὐδεν ὀριζῶ: οὐ μάλλον τουτο η ἐκεῖνο. [...] Plato, who was the first to teach in the academy, and after him his faithful disciple Speusippus, considered Φαινόμενα and νοούμενα to be mutually opposed; and just as they affirmed that it was possible to obtain certainty and evidence of the latter, they likewise denied this characteristic of the former”.

¹⁸ See: Anth, AA 07: 140-141n, tr. 251: “To posit *sensibility* merely in the indistinctness of representations, and *intellectuality* by comparison in the distinctness of representations, and thereby in a merely *formal* (logical) distinction of consciousness instead of a *real* (psychological) one, which concerns not merely the form but also the content of thought, was a great error of the Leibniz-Wolffian school. Their error was, namely, to posit sensibility in a lack (of clarity in our partial ideas), and consequently in indistinctness, and to posit the character of ideas of understanding in distinctness; whereas in fact sensibility is something very positive and an indispensable addition to ideas of the understanding, in order to bring forth a cognition. – But Leibniz was actually to blame. For he, adhering to the Platonic school, assumed innate, pure intellectual intuitions called ideas, which are encountered in the human mind, though now only obscurely; and to whose analysis and illumination by means of attention alone we owe the cognition of objects, as they are in themselves”.

¹⁹ A. G. Baumgarten: *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, Halae Magdeburgicae: Grunert, 1735, § 116.

²⁰ See: KrV, A 21/B 35-36n, tr. 156: "The Germans are the only ones who now employ the word 'aesthetics' to designate that which others call the critique of taste. The ground for this is a failed hope, held by the excellent analyst Baumgarten, of bringing the critical estimation of the beautiful under principles of reason, and elevating its rules to a science. But this effort is futile. For the putative rules or criteria are merely empirical as far as their sources are concerned, and can therefore never serve as *a priori* rules according to which our judgment of taste must be directed, rather the latter constitutes the genuine touchstone of the correctness of the former. For this reason, it is advisable again to desist from the use of this term and to save it for that doctrine which is true science (whereby one would come closer to the language and the sense of the ancients, among whom the division of cognition into αἰσθητά και νοητά was very well known)".

²¹ See: UD, AA 02: 300, tr. 274: "In both practical and theoretical philosophy one must avoid lightly taking for indemonstrable that which in fact is capable of proof. Notwithstanding, those principles, which as postulates contain the foundations of all the other practical principles, are indispensable. Hutcheson and others have, under the name of moral feeling, provided us with a starting point from which to develop some excellent observations"; NEV AA 02: 311, tr. 298: "For the time being, I shall lecture on *universal practical philosophy* and the *doctrine of virtue*, basing both of them on *Baumgarten*. The attempts of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume, although incomplete and defective, have nonetheless penetrated furthest in the search for the fundamental principles of all morality. Their efforts will be given the precision and the completeness which they lack".

²² MSI, AA 02: 413.

²³ MSI, AA 02: 396, tr. 389: "§. 10. There is (for man) no intuition of what belongs to the understanding, but only a *symbolic cognition*; and thinking is only possible for us by means of universal concepts in the abstract, not by means of a singular concept in the concrete. For all our intuition is bound to a certain principle of form, and it is only under this form that anything can be apprehended by the mind immediately or as *singular*, and not merely conceived discursively by means of general concepts. But this formal principle of our intuition (space and time) is the condition under which something can be object of our senses. Accordingly, this formal principle, as the condition of sensitive cognition, is not a means to intellectual intuition".

²⁴ Cfr. A. G. Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, Halae Magdeburgicae: Hemmerde, 1739, § 620 (*Psychologie empirica*), tr. 227: "If the sign is joined together in perception with the signified, and the perception of the sign is greater than the perception of the signified, this is called SYMBOLIC KNOWLEDGE. If the perception of the signified is greater than the perception of the sign, the KNOWLEDGE will be INTUITIVE (intuited). In either kind of knowledge, the law of the faculty of characterization is this: *One of the associated perceptions becomes the means of knowing the existence of the other* (§347)". Kant, V-Met-L1/Pölitz, AA 28: 238, tr. 56: "Where intuition is not immediately allowed to us, there we must help ourselves by analogy [*per analogiam*] with symbolic cognition. We can also say: cognition is symbolic where the object is cognized in the sign, but with discursive cognition the signs are not symbols [*symbola*], because I do not cognize the object in the sign but rather the sign produces only the representation of the object for me".

²⁵ See, e.g.: G. W. Leibniz, *Meditationes de cognitione, veritate et ideis* [1684], PS 04: 422-425. C. Wolff is even more explicit about the symbolic value of words: e.g. *Deutsche Metaphysik*, § 316 (*figürliche Erkenntnis*); *Psychologia empirica*, § 289. Concerning Kant, see: V-Anth/Parow (1772-1773), AA 24: 338-339: "There are signs [*Zeichen*] – which are simply means for attracting [*herbey zu locken*] representations, and others which take the place of the concept of the thing. Signs of the first kind are words [...]. Signs, instead, which replace the concepts of things, are found among poets and are the images [*die Bilder*] of which they make use [...]. Now, a sign that replaces the representation of a thing is called a symbol and is distinguished from a character [...]. In symbols other similar sensible images are posed in the place of the thing".

²⁶ Nachlass, *Collegentwürfe aus den 70er Jahren* (1773-1778), AA 15: 710. See also: Anth, AA 07: 191, tr. 299: "Characters are not yet symbols; for they can also be mere mediate (indirect) signs which in themselves signify nothing, but only signify something through association with intuitions and then leading through them to concepts. Therefore, *symbolic* cognition must not be opposed to *intuitive* but to *discursive* cognition, in which the character accompanies the concept merely as guardian (*custos*), in order to reproduce the concept when the occasion arises".

²⁷ See e.g. KU, AA 05: 352n, tr. 226: "The intuitive in cognition must be contrasted to the discursive (not the symbolic). Now the former is either schematic, by means of demonstration, or symbolic, as a representation based on mere analogy".

²⁸ See e. g. the *Vorarbeiten zur Schrift gegen Eberhard*, AA 20: 362: "Knowledge is either intuitive or discursive. The former is either indirect, i.e. according to analogy, [or] direct and strictly intuitive (made) cognition. The former is symbolic [...]. The cognition united with language is therefore not symbolic".

²⁹ V-Met/Dohna, AA 28: 617. Kant reproduces this distinction in identical terms in the paragraph entitled *Kritische Abhandlung der Transzendentalphilosophie*, V-Met/Dohna, AA 28: 655-656: “We now pass from concepts of objects to which objects of experience can correspond to those for which no object of experience can be adequate. The concept of the first kind is called notion [*Notion*], the second idea [*Idee*]. We therefore pass from notions to ideas. [...] We also call ideas the concepts of reason [*Vernunftbegriffe*].” The semantic opposition between *Begriffe*, characterized by an experiential reference, and *Ideen*, which have no experiential reference, had already appeared in two logic courses in the 1980s, always mediated by the term *notio*, see: V-Lo/Pöhlitz, AA 24: 566: “The pure concept [*conceptus purus*] is the notio. The notio is thus more than the conceptus, but in German there is no corresponding expression. The notio whose object [*Gegenstand*] can be presented in concrete is notio intellectus, while the concept that cannot be given in any experience is idea. One can call the idea a concept of reason [*Vernunftbegriff*], because through reason I think something a priori”; cfr. also V-Lo/Busolt, AA 24: 653-654. These passages, in which the contribution of the critical turn to the distinction between *concept* and *idea* is clearly detectable, seems to definitively clarify some ambiguities in the distinction between the two terms that were often encountered in the lecture texts. In this sense, in a course of the late 1970s on the *Philosophical Encyclopedia*, Ideas were not characterized in the critical sense, but were still and expressly understood in a Platonic sense: “if the conceptus is drawn a priori it is a notio. The highest degree of notion [*Notion*] is the idea in the Platonic sense, which expresses the archetype of the thing [*Sache*]” (AA 29: 17). Kant probably inherited his early conception of the relationship between *concept* and *idea* from School texts such as M. Knutzen’s *Elementa philosophiae rationalis seu logicae cum generalis tum specialioris mathematica methodo demonstrata*, Lipsiae: Hartung, 1747 (repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1991). Here, in the section entitled *De Prima Mentis Operatione s. Ideis, et earundem signis s. terminis*, in the *Observatio* § 60, the *Definitio* § 61, the *Scholion* at § 62 and above all the *Scholion* at § 63, all the characteristics that in Kant’s mature reflection will be assigned to the *concept* are ascribed to a generic *idea*. On the specific meaning of the concept of idea in Kant see: Hinske 1990.

³⁰ V-Met/Dohna, AA 28: 617.

³¹ V-Met/Dohna, AA 28: 617.

³² See: *On the Ideas in general*, *KrV*, A 321/B 377, tr. 399: “A concept is either an empirical or a pure concept, and the pure concept, insofar as it has its origin solely in the understanding (not in a pure image of sensibility), is called *notio*. A concept made up of notions [*Notionen*], which goes beyond the possibility of experience, is an idea or a concept of reason. Anyone who has become accustomed to this distinction must find it unbearable to hear a representation of the color red called an idea. It is not even to be called a notion [*Notion*] (a concept of the understanding)”.

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