

KANT AND THE PROJECT OF A PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

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This paper is divided into four sections. The first section explores the concept of a philosophical history of philosophy; the second section argues that the history of pure reason must be understood as a history of self-enlightenment; the third section reconstructs the general lines of a history of pure reason and its symmetry with the nature of reason; the fourth and final section addresses the question of the legitimacy and theoretical status of the project.

1. THE CONCEPT OF A PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

The last chapter of the *Critique of pure reason* sketches the outlines of a project that will remain unfinished. According to Kant, this chapter simply designates “a place that is left open in the system and must be filled in the future” and is aimed to be carried out “from a merely transcendental point of view, namely that of nature of the pure reason” (CPR B880).

A history always has an object and assumes a perspective. As far as the object is concerned, a history of reason can refer either to concepts with an *a priori* or an *a posteriori* origin. In the first case, we are dealing with concepts that involve necessity and universality, while in the second case we are dealing with contingent concepts, since they are the result of empirical abstractions. We must also distinguish between two types of *a priori* concepts, namely mathematical concepts and philosophical concepts. Mathematical concepts are concepts constructed in the pure form of intuition. In this case we have knowledge of the universal in concrete. Philosophy, on the other hand, deals with knowledge of the universal in the abstract. Philosophical concepts cannot be constructed in intuition and must therefore be justified by a different procedure of justification, which Kant calls deduction in some cases and exposition in others. Thus, philosophy must justify how concepts such as “causality”, “existence”, or “substance” can refer *a priori* to the field of experience. We can say that philosophical knowledge is speculative and mathematical knowledge is non-speculative.

<https://doi.org/10.36311/2318-0501.2024.v12n1.p175>

We can consider the history of philosophy from an internal perspective or from an external perspective of reason. A history that adopts the internal perspective seeks to explain philosophical concepts in terms of a genealogical link with the nature of reason. The aim is to reconstruct history in such a way as to show that the emergence of these concepts is linked to certain characteristics of the human rational faculty. On the other hand, adopting a perspective outside of reason means cumulatively describing these concepts and explaining them in terms of the economic, political, social, cultural, or even geographical circumstances in which a given philosophical concept developed. In this case, the aim is to establish causal relationships between theories and social contexts. According to Kant, only the internal perspective can claim rationality or meaning for the history of concepts.

It is possible to clarify the “internal-external” opposition on the basis of the distinction found in the Logic (see Log AA 09: 20-23)² between the objective origin of knowledge. According to its objective origin, all knowledge is either rational or empirical. Knowledge of rational origin is distinguished from empirical knowledge by virtue of being acquired according to principles (*ex principiis*), whereas the latter is acquired on the basis of data (*ex datis*). The former entails necessity and unrestricted universality, whereas the latter is contingent. In this case, a history from the internal perspective of reason would be a narrative that takes principles as its guiding thread, and therefore it would involve necessity and universality. On the other hand, an empirical history of pure reason takes a perspective external to reason. Since Kant identifies rational knowledge of the universal in abstract with philosophy (see Log, AA 09: 29), we can say that the internal perspective corresponds to a philosophical narrative of philosophy, while the external perspective corresponds to a historical narrative of philosophy.

Thus, by combining the options between the different perspectives and objects, the following set of configurations is obtained:

- 1 - Philosophical history of *a posteriori* concepts;
- 2 - Philosophical history of *a priori* concepts;
 - 2.1 - Philosophical history of speculative *a priori* concepts;
 - 2.2 - Philosophical history of non-speculative (mathematical) *a priori* concepts;
- 3 - Empirical history of *a posteriori* concepts;
- 4 - Empirical history of *a priori* concepts;
 - 4.1 - Empirical history of speculative *a priori* concepts;
 - 4.2 - Empirical history of non-speculative (mathematical) *a priori* concepts.

Not all of these combinations imply a real possibility. The option 1, for example, seem to be logically impossible.

While historians of philosophy carry out an empirical history of speculative *a priori* concepts (4.1), the Kantian project differs from the latter by adopting a philosophical

perspective (2.1). Historians of philosophy carry out a literary-bibliographical study, whose aim is to describe the philosophical problems and their treatment over time. In this case, different systems can be compared, either to assess which one is best suited to solve a greater variety of problems, or to explain their emergence on the basis of the historical and economic contexts in which they have been developed. By aiming to establish continuity or discontinuity of problems and concepts along different philosophies, historiographical research is committed to a specific method and discipline, but is not based on an organizing principle. Therefore, this perspective cannot rationally evaluate the past use of concepts because it does not address the nature of reason itself. Although this method might do some justice to the internal dialogue between different philosophies provided that it does not completely subordinate philosophical problems to external criteria (such as an explanation based on economic or political facts), it still remains empirical history according to the criteria set out by Kant. There is a specific place and validity for each type of history, but the claims to legitimacy and how they are used need to be clearly distinguished from one another.

According to Kant, the philosophical history of speculative *a priori* concepts (2.1) can also be called a “philosophizing history of philosophy” (see FM, AA 20:340) or a philosophical history of metaphysics. For him,

a philosophical history of philosophy is itself possible, not historically or empirically, but rationally, i.e., *a priori*. For although it 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, AA 20:341)

Leaving aside the fragmentary and lacunar character of the manuscripts collected under the title of *The Progress of Metaphysics*, we find in this text a strong indication of what the project of the history of pure reason would be, namely a philosophical archaeology that would explain the emergence of certain philosophical theory and concepts in terms of a principle internal to reason. This is the case of “whether a history of philosophy might be written mathematically” (FM, AA 20:342). Thus, the different philosophical concepts would, in a specific sense, be deduced from the nature of reason.

2. THE HISTORY AS A PROCESS OF SELF-ENLIGHTENMENT

One of the tasks of the *Critique of pure reason* is to show that the human understanding is the source of certain representations that are *a priori* valid in relation to phenomena. According to Kant, these representations, the categories, have always been and will always be the same³. In this case, how can we speak of a history of pure reason? For there to be history, there must be movement (i.e. changes of states), but how can we think of any movement in a reason that has structures that can never be extended or modified?

To deal with this question, it is necessary to distinguish between a quantitative change and a qualitative change in reason. The former refers to a change in the amount of accumulated knowledge⁴. Thus the reason of two people from different periods is different because they have different amounts of knowledge about something. The second concerns a change in the character of reason itself. That is to say, the denial of a nature of human reason and its *a priori*

structures. This means, at the very least, questioning the possibility of knowing at time T2 what was known and written by other individuals at time T1. In this case, we would no longer speak of “human reason”, but of “multiple rationalities”. This theoretical position was the result reached in the second phase of the historicist movement, which took place in the 19th century and has relativism as its main consequence⁵.

Since, for Kant, there is only one reason, history must be conceived in terms of a change in the amount of speculative knowledge that reason has about itself. In this way, the history of the speculative use of reason would be an improvement in the attempts to know the object *a priori* and, indirectly, to know and clarify itself (both in its capacities and in its limits). Because reason is not transparent to itself, the history of pure reason must be seen as the history of its self-enlightenment. We can speak in these terms only insofar as pure reason functions as an objective standard.

In order to do justice to the plurality and diversity of attempts, while at the same time maintaining the prospect of objectivity, it is necessary to guarantee substantial changes in philosophical perspectives and methodologies, without falling into atomistic relativism. This requires elements of convergence that allow comparison and continuity between these models. This element is the idea of pure reason and a rational nature.⁶

The position adopted by Kant vis-à-vis the previous philosophical tradition can be exemplified in the following passage:

Plato made use of the expression **idea** in such a way that we can really see that he understood by it something that not only could never be borrowed from the senses, but that even goes far beyond the concepts of the understanding (with which Aristotle occupied himself), since nothing encountered in experience could ever be congruent to it. Ideas for him are archetypes of things themselves, and not, like the categories, merely the key to possible experiences. In his opinion they flowed from the highest reason, through which human reason partakes in them; our reason, however, now no longer finds itself in its original state, but must call back with toil the old, now very obscure ideas through a recollection (which is called philosophy) **I do not wish to go into any literary investigation here**, in order to make out the sense which the sublime philosopher combined with his word. **I note only that when we compare the thoughts that an author expresses about a subject, in ordinary speech as well as in writings, 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. (CPR, B 370, **bold added**)

Kant's characterization of the concept of “idea” that Plato is said to have possessed is done in an evaluative rather than a hermeneutic or exegetical way. This can be seen in his terminology (for example, “far beyond the concepts of the understanding”, “key to possible experiences”). Kant is not interested in knowing how the “sublime philosopher” dealt with particular metaphysical problems, nor with terminological issues. Rather, he is interested in using an element of his philosophy and modifying it according to certain needs. But by what criteria can we say that it is possible to understand a philosopher better than he understood himself? This is only possible on the basis of a criterion that is no longer subjective, “otherwise, the unqualified historian and judge assesses the groundless assertions of others through his own, which are equally groundless” (CPR B 27). This means that:

A history of philosophy is of such a special kind, that nothing can be told therein of what has happened, without knowing beforehand what should have happened, and also what can happen. Whether this has been investigated beforehand or whether it has been reasoned out haphazardly. For it is the history, not of the opinions which have chanced to arise here or there, but of reason developing itself from concepts. (FM, AA 20:343)

These bolder formulations inevitably lead to other questions: What is the basis that allows Kant to objectively judge the preceding metaphysical systems? In other words, why should the “transcendental standpoint” work as the basis for a future history of pure reason?⁷ The combination of these questions provides us a clue. Kant believes that it is the transcendental perspective, resulting from the Copernican revolution in thought carried out by the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that provides the criteria for objectively judging previous metaphysical systems.

Kant’s proposed Copernican revolution refers to a radical change in the way and method of thinking about the metaphysical problems concerning the possibility of *a priori* knowledge. It is conceived in analogy to the revolutions that, according to him, took place in mathematics (with Thales) and in natural science (with Bacon) (see CPR Bxxii). Instead of thinking that our *a priori* representations are determined by the object, we should investigate whether objects are not determined by our *a priori* representations (see CPR Bxvi-xvii and Bxxiii). In this case, metaphysics would no longer be concerned, at least in the first instance, with objects, but only with the faculties of our mind that provide the *a priori* forms of objects. In other words, the new methodological approach no longer follows the path of formulating *a priori* judgments about objects, but rather investigates what conditions allow *a priori* judgments to be made, and whether human beings possess them.

For that this should be possible, indeed that such a system should not be too great in scope for us to hope to be able entirely to complete it, can be assessed in advance from the fact that our object is not the nature of things, which is inexhaustible, but the understanding, which judges about the nature of things, and this in turn only in regard to its *a priori* cognition, the supply of which, since we do not need to search for it externally, cannot remain hidden from us, and in all likelihood is small enough to be completely recorded (...). (CPR, B 26)

In other words,

this science cannot be terribly extensive, for it does not deal with objects of reason, whose multiplicity is infinite, but merely with itself, with problems that spring entirely from its own womb, and that are not set before it the nature of things that are distinct from it but through its own nature. (CPR B 23)

But Kant’s thesis is stronger than the claim that *a priori* knowledge *can* be measured. For him, it is a *duty* of metaphysics to achieve the completeness of all principles of *a priori* knowledge. “Hence as a fundamental science, metaphysics is also bound to achieve this completeness, and we must be able to say of it: *nil aetum reputans, si quid superesset agendum*” (CPR B xxiv). This happens because:

pure speculative reason is, in respect of principles of cognition, a unity entirely separate and subsisting for itself, in which, as in an organized body, every part exists for the sake of all the others as all the others exist for its sake, and no principle can be taken with certainty in *one* relation unless it has at the same time been investigated in its *thoroughgoing* relation to the entire use of pure reason. (CPR B xxiii)

For metaphysics is by nature and intention a completed whole; either nothing or everything. So what is required for its final purpose cannot be dealt with in a fragmentary way, as in mathematics or empirical natural science, where progress is constant and unending. But we shall attempt the task nonetheless. (FM AA 20: 259)

The investigation of reason itself must be systematic, because only in this way can one be sure that one has reached the completeness of the principles of reason. “Under the government of reason our cognitions cannot at all constitute a rhapsody but must constitute a system” (CPR B860) This means that one cannot attribute principles to reason in a haphazard way, as would happen if one were to come across them by chance, as was the case with Aristotle. His “search for these fundamental concepts was an effort worthy of an acute man. But since he had no principle, he rounded them up as he stumbled on them” (CPR B106f.). Moreover, the investigation of pure reason must be carried out through a dogmatic procedure, that is, “through the regular ascertainment of the principles, the clear determination of concepts, the attempt at strictness in the proofs, and the prevention of audacious leaps in inferences” (CPR Bxxxvi). Therefore, the Criticism must be carried out in a systematic and dogmatic way, according to the highest academic standards.

Thus, the confidence that Kant expresses in his philosophical system is justified by the combination of new view offered by the Copernican turn, the articulated nature of reason, and a dogmatic and systematic method of analyzing reason. This is made clear in the second preface of the *Critique of pure reason*, where the nature of pure speculative reason is conceived as consisting of a

truly articulated structure of members in which each thing is an organ, that is, in which everything is for the sake of each member, and each individual member is for the sake of all, so that even the least frailty, whether it be a mistake (an error) or a lack, must inevitably betray itself in its use. I hope this system will henceforth maintain itself in this unalterability. It is not self-conceit that justifies my trust in this, but rather merely the evidence drawn from the experiment showing that the result effected is the same whether we proceed from the smallest elements to the whole of pure reason or return from the whole to every part (for this whole too is given in itself through the final intention of pure reason in the practical); while the attempt to alter even the smallest part directly introduces contradictions not merely into the system, but into universal human reason. (CPR Bxxxviif.)

The critique of pure reason, as an investigation whose object is reason itself, aims to grasp those characteristics that define the nature of human reason and would be the foundation for an objective analysis of the history of metaphysics. It can therefore be said that the last chapter of the CPR proposes a history from a transcendental point of view, since “transcendental” is the concept that characterizes the knowledge acquired through a critique of pure reason, i.e. a knowledge “that is occupied not so much with objects, but rather with our a priori concepts of objects in general” (CPR B 25).

When Kant speaks of a “nature of reason”, he is referring to certain qualities that are intrinsic to human reason. Indeed, Kant could be criticized for making such a loaded assumption. However, all of these qualities are not ascribed to reason in a dogmatic way, but rather through a careful examination and justification that follows a dogmatic procedure. Among those properties, not all have the same theoretical status. “Nature” ranges from objective

properties expressed by representations with objective validity, such as pure forms of intuition and categories, to subjective properties expressed by ideas or maxims (subjective principles).

Now, since the existence of an unchanging nature of reason serves as the objective foundation for the philosophical history of philosophy, the history of philosophy itself must be characterized as a process of self-enlightenment about reason's own properties and laws. Since reason is not transparent to itself, the process of self-enlightenment can be long and tortuous, happening mostly through attempts and failures, and driven by various interests stemming from different capacities and modes of use.

3. THE OUTLINE OF A HISTORY OF PURE REASON AND ITS SYMMETRY WITH THE NATURE OF REASON

There are therefore three stages which philosophy had to traverse in its approach to metaphysics. The first was the stage of dogmatism; the second that of skepticism; and the third that of the criticism of pure reason. This temporal sequence is founded in the nature of man's cognitive capacity. Once the first two stages have been passed, the state of metaphysics can continue to vacillate for many centuries, leaping from an unlimited self-confidence of reason to boundless mistrust, and back again. But a critique of its own powers would put it into a condition of stability, both external and internal, in which it would need neither increase nor decrease, nor even be capable of this. (FM AA 20: 264)

An account similar to the one quoted above can also be found in the Critique of Pure Reason:

One can call a procedure of this sort, subjecting the *facta* of reason to examination and when necessary to blame, the *ensorship* of reason. It is beyond doubt that this censorship inevitably leads to *doubt* about all transcendent use of principles. But this is only the second step, which is far from completing the work. The first step in matters of pure reason, which characterizes its childhood, is dogmatic. The just mentioned second step is skeptical, and gives evidence of the caution of the power of judgment sharpened by experience. Now, however, a third step is still necessary, which pertains only to the mature and adult power of judgment, which has at its basis firm maxims of proven universality, that, namely, which subjects to evaluation not the *facta* of reason but reason itself, as concerns its entire capacity and suitability for pure *a priori* cognitions; this is not the censorship but the *critique* of pure reason, whereby not merely *limits* but rather the determinate *boundaries* of it - not merely ignorance in one part or another but ignorance in regard to an possible questions of a certain sort - are not merely suspected but are proved from principles. (CPR, B188f.)

These passages can be analyzed in two ways: first, in terms of the stages of metaphysics and their interrelations; second, in terms of the nature of the project of a history of pure reason, that is, the legitimacy of the connection between each stage and the "nature of man's cognitive capacity" (FM AA 20: 264). I deal with the former in this section and the latter in the next. The point here, then, is to understand the main features of the three stages of metaphysics: Dogmatism, Skepticism, and Criticism.

Dogmatism, or the infancy of metaphysics, is characterized by the

the presumption of getting on solely with pure cognition from (philosophical) concepts according to principles, which reason has been using for a long time without first inquiring in what way and by what right it has obtained them. Dogmatism is therefore the dogmatic procedure of pure reason, *without an antecedent critique of its own capacity*. (CPR, Bxxxv)

It can be said that the maxim underlying the procedure of Dogmatism is the following: ‘the limits of possible knowledge are established on the basis of attempts to know supersensible objects’, or alternatively, ‘you discover what you can know by trying it’⁸.

Kant gives at least five reasons or causes for the emergence and long perpetuation of Dogmatism, namely:

1. The natural (theoretical, but above all practical) interest of reason in the objects of metaphysics: God, freedom, and the immortality of the soul (see CPR B 6f.; B881). From these three objects arise the three disciplines that constitute special metaphysics (rational theology, rational cosmology, and rational psychology).
2. Misplaced confidence created by advances in mathematics⁹.
3. Failure to distinguish between synthetic and analytic judgments, which gave the false impression that the analysis of mere concepts provided a real increase in the knowledge of objects¹⁰.
4. Based on the maxim that “you find out what you can know by trying it” (a maxim that works quite well in the field of experience), it has become the customary fate of reason to construct a building and only then to investigate its legitimacy. However, due to the empirical nature of the use of reason, once the building is constructed, various pretexts are created to avoid a detailed examination of its foundations¹¹. It is in this vein that Kant’s critique of Locke runs: he “opened the gates wide to enthusiasm, since reason, once it has authority on its side, will not be kept within limits by indeterminate recommendations of moderation” (CPR B 128).
5. All speculation of the dogmatic metaphysician is beyond the reach of empirical refutation, precisely because its object transcends the field of experience. Thus, the only care the metaphysician has to take is to avoid a contradiction within the speculation, and this can be easily avoided by careful adherence to the principle of non-contradiction.

In its historical course, dogmatic metaphysics has failed to distinguish between ideas, which can have as their object only the suprasensible, and the categories of understanding, which are the rules for syntheses in the field of possible experience (see FM AA 20: 319f.). This error is caused by “a *natural* and *unavoidable* illusion which itself rests on subjective principles and passes them off as objective” (CPR B 354). In other words,

there is a natural and unavoidable dialectic of pure reason, not one in which a bungler might be entangled through lack of acquaintance, or one that some sophist has artfully invented in order to confuse rational people, but one that irremediably attaches to human reason, so that even after we have exposed the mirage it will still not cease to lead our reason on with false hopes, continually propelling it into momentary aberrations that always need to be removed. (CPR B 354f.)

This “natural and unavoidable dialectic of pure reason” occurs because reason, understood as the whole higher faculty of knowledge, is not composed of homogeneous elements. One of

the important innovations in Kant's philosophy is the distinction between understanding and reason in a strict sense. The former has rules that make it possible to understand phenomena as part of nature, while the latter provides concepts about the unconditioned. While the former have objective reality, the latter has only subjective principles. The error arises either when the faculty of judgment takes the subjective principles of reason to be objective concepts of understanding, or when it makes the categories are used beyond the field of possible experience. In this way, a series of contradictions inevitably emerges from within dogmatism, which makes reason appear to be antinomical.

The positions of thesis and antithesis in antinomies do not arise by accident. Both positions, though false, are motivated by interests rooted in the nature of reason. On the side of the thesis, two fundamental interests are at stake: a practical interest, "in which every well-disposed person, once he understands its true advantage to him, heartily shares", because it guarantees the "cornerstones of morality and religion" (CPR B 494); and a speculative interest, because through transcendental ideas "one can grasp the whole chain of conditions fully a priori and comprehend the derivation of the conditioned, starting with the unconditioned" (CPR B 495). On the side of the antithesis, there is also a strong speculative interest, according to which "the understanding is at every time on its own proper ground, namely the field solely of possible experiences, whose laws it traces, and by means of which it can endlessly extend its secure and comprehensible cognition" (CPR B 496). The opposition between thesis and antithesis portrays the opposition of "Epicureanism against Platonism" (see CPR B 499), or the opposition between sensualists and intellectualists.

Each of the two says more than it knows, but in such a way that the first encourages and furthers knowledge, though to the disadvantage of the practical, the second provides principles which are indeed excellent for the practical, but in so doing allows reason, in regard to that of which only a speculative knowledge is granted us, to indulge in ideal explanations of natural appearances, and to neglect the physical investigation of them. (CPR B499f.)

The dogmatic phase culminates in this antinomical state or a "dialectical arena". Metaphysics "is rather a battlefield, and indeed one that appears to be especially determined for testing one's powers in mock combat; on this battlefield no combatant has ever gained the least bit of ground, nor has any been able to base any lasting possession on his victory." (CPR Bxiv- xv) Kant also compares metaphysical systems to buildings in ruins (see CPR B880). It is a distinct feature of this reasoning that it is made in an apagogical way. So, it is reason itself that destroys its own attempts, not the experience that undermines it.

From this inevitable dialectic of human reason and from the fact that no permanent result has been achieved on the terrain of the suprasensible, arises the second stage of metaphysics: *Skepticism*. It adopts "a principle of artful and scientific ignorance that undermines the foundations of all cognition, in order, if possible, to leave no reliability or certainty anywhere." (CPR B451) It produces a distrust towards both the knowledge and the cognoscitive capacities.

However, for Kant, Skepticism

merely *limits* our understanding without *drawing* boundaries for it, and brings about a general distrust but no determinate knowledge of the ignorance that is unavoidable for us, by censuring certain principles of the understanding without placing this understanding regard to its entire capacity on the scales of critique, and, while rightly denying to understanding what it really cannot accomplish, goes further, and disputes all its capacity to expand itself *a priori* without having assessed this entire capacity, the same thing happens to him that always brings down skepticism, namely, he is himself doubted, for his objections rest only on *facta*, which are contingent, but not on principles a that could effect a necessary renunciation of the right to dogmatic assertions. (CPR B795f.)

Kant explains his claim that Skepticism is based on facts and not on principles in the following passage:

All failed dogmatic attempts reason are *facta*, which it is always useful to subject to censure. But this cannot decide anything about reason's expectations of hoping for better success in its future efforts and making claims to that; mere censure can therefore never bring to an end the controversy about what is lawful in human reason. (CPR B792)

Thus, Skepticism is perfectly justified in doubting all previous dogmatic-metaphysical efforts, but it is not justified in denying the possibility of future progress in metaphysics through a better-founded project.

In the history of pure reason, skepticism is portrayed as “a resting place for human reason, which can reflect upon its dogmatic peregrination and make a survey of the region in which it finds itself in order to be able to choose its path in the future with greater certainty, but it is not a dwelling-place for permanent residence” (CPR B789). In other words, skeptical procedure “is nevertheless preparatory for arousing its caution and showing it fundamental means for securing it in its rightful possessions,” (CPR B797) but it cannot be the end point of inquiry. For Kant, reason must be able to fully answer the questions that arise from its own nature, so it is necessary to answer the questions of reason on the basis of a critical investigation based on principles and not on doubts based on facts.

Thus, in the context of the history of pure reason, Skepticism is seen as a stage whose goal is to rouse the awakening metaphysicians from their dogmatic dream and force them to engage in a process of self-knowledge. But skepticism in itself is not productive. It neither satisfies reason's inherent metaphysical interests nor clearly defines the limits of possible knowledge.¹² Skepticism even undermines any pure natural science by casting doubt on the entire *a priori* account of experience.

Once these first two steps have been made, metaphysics can move on to next one, which can only be accomplished by a mature faculty of judgment. This third stage is Criticism or Critical philosophy. It is based on the assumption that before we make judgments claiming to know objects, we must examine the conditions of possibility of those judgments. Criticism has the maxim that the first and inescapable task of metaphysics is to engage in critical reflection. This reflection is compared to a trial in which reason plays the role of both judge and defendant. In the “trial” each “claim of possession” of a particular kind of knowledge must be justified on

the basis of a deduction, that is, a justification based on principles that can be publicly accepted and shared.

Kant believed that he had accomplished this task in his *Critique of pure reason*. An attempt is made to clarify the meaning of criticism by drawing an analogy with the theory of jusnaturalism. In this sense, the realization of a critique of pure reason represents the transition in metaphysics from a state of nature to a state of legality. Disputes should no longer be settled by war, but by a due process according to a law that reason gives for itself³.

In this way, a bipartite division of the history of pure reason comes into play, namely a part corresponding to a pre-metaphysics characterized by the state of nature, and a part referring to a metaphysics characterized by the state of law. The first is characterized by a period of pre-science, in which investigators remain in a simple “groping”. The second begins with a revolution in thinking, which in this case can be called the “Copernican revolution in the way thinking”. This revolution is the beginning of metaphysics as a science (see CPR B xff.; Prol, AA 04: 365ff.).

While Kant states in the preface that for each science there is only one revolution from the pre-scientific to the scientific period, in the last chapter he speaks of several changes that can be distinguished in three ways. With regard to the object of knowledge, the philosophers were either sensualists or intellectualists; with regard to the origin of knowledge, they were either empiricists or noologists; with regard to the method, they either followed the naturalism of reason, “a mere misology brought to principles” (CPR B883), or they followed a scientific method, in which case they proceeded either dogmatically or skeptically. In the last Chapter he also does not explicitly mention his theory about the three stages in the history of metaphysics: Dogmatism, Skepticism, and Criticism. But if we combine this division with the one above, we could say that both the sensualists and intellectualists (with regard to the object) and the empiricists and noologists (with regard to the origin of knowledge) are representatives of the Dogmatism. As for the scientific method, Kant maintains the distinction between dogmatists (Wolf) and skeptics (Hume). It seems that there are at least two different uses of the Dogmatism. The first, as a dogmatic attitude, according to which the philosopher assumes that pure reason need not undergo a critique of its capacity (see CRP Bxxxv). The second, as a ‘foundationalist perspective’ that marks the position of the *Thesis* in the *Antinomy of pure reason*. In this case, Dogmatism is opposed to Empiricism.

As for Criticism, we can see that it expresses a kind of “synthesis” between the above positions. A clear example of this emerges in terms of *method*. On the one hand, critical philosophy adopts the dogmatic procedure, i.e., it establishes principles according to laws, clearly defines concepts, seeks rigor in demonstrations, and avoids reckless leaps in conclusions (see CRP B xxxvi). On the other hand, it also uses the skeptical method, i.e. a procedure that seeks to impartially assess the conflict of the assertions of pure reason in order to discover its point of contradiction. In contrast to Skepticism, the skeptical method

aims at certainty, seeking to discover the point of misunderstanding in disputes that are honestly intended and conducted with intelligence by both sides, in order to do as wise legislators do when from the embarrassment of judges in cases of litigation they draw instruction concerning that which is defective and imprecisely determined in their laws. (CPR B451f.)

The dogmatic method is different from Dogmatism, just as the skeptical method is different from Skepticism. One could say that Dogmatism uses the dogmatic method, but rejects the principle of evaluating the legitimacy of the first principles. In the same way, Skepticism uses the skeptical method, but also assumes “a principle of artful and scientific ignorance that undermines the foundations of all cognition” (CPR B451), i.e., it does not intend in any way to carry out a critique of the faculty of reason. In this sense, Kant tries to use the best of each method and stage, but it grows out of its own independent principle and cannot be ‘derived’ from previous positions.

4. THE LEGITIMACY AND THEORETICAL STATUS OF THE PROJECT OF A PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

“There are therefore three stages which philosophy *had to* traverse in its approach to metaphysics. The first was the stage of dogmatism; the second that of skepticism; and the third that of the criticism of pure reason. *This temporal sequence is founded in the nature of man’s cognitive capacity.*” (FM AA 20: 264, emphasis added) This passage can be compared to a similar one from the first *Critique*, namely, “it is remarkable enough, although *it could not naturally have been otherwise*, that in the infancy of philosophy human beings began where we should now rather end, namely, by studying first the cognition of God and the hope or indeed even the constitution of another world.” (CPR B880, *emphasis added*) These texts raise some questions: In what sense can it be said that the first two stages of the history of philosophy were necessary for the emergence of critical philosophy? What kind of interdependence exists between the three stages of metaphysics?

A distinction between an epistemological dependence and a factual dependence is necessary to deal with those questions. By epistemological dependence is meant a theoretical connection between the results of previous philosophical systems in such a way that they would be taken as starting points for Criticism. In this case, Dogmatism and Skepticism would be taken as premises for Critical philosophy. In this way, it would be impossible for Criticism to have arisen before the others. This cannot be the kind of dependence that Kant is talking about. An example that he thought metaphysics could have started on the safe path of a science long ago is found in the following passage: “That metaphysics has until now remained in such a vacillating state of uncertainty and contradictions is to be ascribed solely to the cause that no one has previously thought of (...) the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments.” (CPR B19)

By “factual dependence” I mean a connection that is in itself contingent (from the perspective of reason itself), but at the same time natural, given certain conditions of our regular use of reason. This contingency is, however, inevitable, that is, it extends to every human use of reason. By “contingent” is meant certain characteristics of human reason in its relation to sensibility (understood in a broad sense that includes emotions, for example, and not only as spatio-temporal perception). Then a distinction should be made between “reason” and “human reason”. When Kant speaks of the former, he is referring to the legitimate conditions for the use

of reason, understood in a normative sense¹⁴. In the second case, the human conditions of use are taken into account.

Let's look at some cases of this human use of reason: Could Skepticism have come before Dogmatism? The skeptic either doubts that we can know something, or doubts that the dogmatist has succeeded in proving our knowledge of something. In the second case, skepticism must necessarily follow dogmatism. In the first case, skepticism couldn't have arisen before dogmatism either, since it does not arise as a questioning of the common use of reason. The common use of human reason in everyday problems does not give rise to skeptical doubts. Without Dogmatism, then, there would still be no speculative use of reason. Skepticism must therefore follow dogmatism, and this succession is also based on a fact, namely the existence of speculative thinking.

Another example: Criticism assumes that dogmatism must develop itself to a certain point before it can emerge. This dependence is based on the fact that the disagreement between the principles of pure reason presents itself with a certain clarity. For example:

The conflict cultivates reason by the consideration of its object on both sides, and corrects its judgment by thus limiting it. What is here in dispute is not the *matter* but the *tone*. For enough remains left to you to speak the language, justified by the sharpest reason, of a firm *belief*, even though you must surrender that of *knowledge*. (CPR B772)

Reason also very much needs such a conflict, and it is to be wished that it had been undertaken earlier and with unlimited public permission. For then a mature critique would have come about all the earlier, at the appearance of which all of this controversy would have had to disappear, since the disputants would have learned insight into the illusion and prejudices that have disunited them. (CPR B775)

Now, just as the antinomies of pure reason were one of the starting points (a factual condition) of Kant's investigation for the first *Critique*, he also considers that the full development of this antagonism is a condition for the emergence of Criticism.

Dogmatism was the first stage of metaphysics for two central reasons: firstly, the great interest (theoretical and practical) that human reason has in the unconditioned; and secondly, the fact that reason assumes in the realm of the suprasensible the same maxim that is used quite successfully for the knowledge of empirical objects, namely, the maxim that 'you discover what you can know by trying it'.

The question now is: what is the theoretical status of this historical narrative? At the beginning of this paper, it was shown that Kant thought of a philosophical history of philosophy in which each stage could be derived from the nature of reason. We also saw that the chronological order between the stages is not based on an epistemological connection, but on a factual one, that is, a connection based on the human nature of reason. Kant presents the different philosophical positions - especially in terms of origin (empiricists and noologists) and object (sensualists and empiricists) - as related to "interests of reason". Thus, each type of philosophy can be linked to the nature of reason through a particular "interest". Empiricism, for example, accurately represents the interest of the understanding in always remaining on its true and proper ground, namely, experience (see CPR B496).

Every stage of metaphysics is linked to an interest of reason. But what kind of connection is this? Is it a kind of deduction or a kind of interpretation? If it were a deduction in the strong sense, one would have to show both that there are certain interests of reason and that they are able to justify certain philosophical positions. Both tasks can hardly be accomplished. It then remains to assume that the connection between the interests of reason and types of philosophical positions is a subjectively necessary connection, i.e. it is not a matter of proving it, but of *interpreting* the history of metaphysics *as if it were* a “mathematically composed” history.

Moreover, an “interest” as a subjective ground cannot support an objective claim, so the history of pure reason cannot have objective validity. The history of pure reason must be interpreted within the horizon of a regulative theory. Thus, it would be the philosopher/historian who, on the basis of an idea, would establish the connection between the nature of reason and its history. The guiding idea for the hermeneutic compass would be the idea of enlightened reason understood as an organic system. Thus, the history of pure reason integrates the system of reason insofar as a way of satisfying the systematic interest of reason.

If the above interpretation is correct, then the history of pure reason can be brought closer to the theory of universal history developed in the *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, published in 1784. Both projects have a regulative validity and are justified on the basis of an interest in bringing rationality to the historical process, while at the same time acknowledging the limits and nature of our cognitive capacities.¹⁵ This objectivity is regulative in the sense that it cannot be objectively proven. But it is not merely contingent, for it is the only legitimate way if one wants to do something different from a merely empirical history. *Mutatis mutandis*, “it is only a thought of that which a philosophical mind (which besides this would have to be very well versed in history) could attempt from another standpoint” (Idea AA 08: 30).

The regulative perspective also requires a justification, which in the case of a philosophical history of philosophy implies a commitment *to the search for objectivity*, or even a commitment to rationality, not as something given or finished, but as an ideal (an archetype) that should guide philosophical activity in its endeavors (the ectype). The following passage clearly states this position:

Now the system of all philosophical cognition is *philosophy*. One must take this objectively if one understands by it the archetype for the assessment of all attempts to serve to philosophize, which should serve to assess each subjective philosophy, the structure of which is often so manifold and variable. In this way philosophy is a mere idea of a possible science, which is nowhere given *in concreto*, but which one seeks to approach in various ways until the only footpath, much overgrown by sensibility, is discovered, and the hitherto unsuccessful ectype, so far as it has been granted to humans, is made equal to the archetype. Until then one cannot learn any philosophy; for where is it, who has possession of it, and by what can it be recognized? One can only learn to philosophize, i.e., to exercise the talent of reason in prosecuting its general principles in certain experiments that come to hand, but always with the reservation of the right of reason to investigate the sources of these principles themselves and to confirm or reject them. (CPR B 866)

He does not abandon this position, for it reappears in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. The following is a long passage, but it is worth quoting because it illustrates in detail how Kant understood the regulative principle applied to his own philosophical work:

It sounds arrogant, conceited, and belittling of those who have not yet renounced their old system to assert that before the coming of the critical philosophy there was as yet no philosophy at all. - In order to decide about this apparent presumption, it need but be asked *whether there could really be more than one philosophy*. Not only have there been different ways of philosophizing and of going back to the first principles of reason in order to base a system, more or less successfully, upon them, but there had to be many experiments of this kind, each of which made its contribution to present-day philosophy. Yet since, considered objectively, there can be only one human reason, there cannot be many philosophies; in other words, there can be only one true system of philosophy from principles, in however many different and even conflicting ways one has philosophized about one and the same proposition. So the *moralist* rightly says that there is only one virtue and one doctrine of virtue, that is, a single system that connects all duties of virtue by one principle; the *chemist*, that there is only one chemistry (Lavoisier's); the *teacher of medicine*, that there is only one principle for systematically classifying diseases (Brown's). Although the *new system* excludes all the others, it does not detract from the merits of earlier moralists, chemists, and teachers of medicine, since without their discoveries and even their unsuccessful attempts we should not have attained that unity of the true principle which unifies the whole of philosophy into one system. - So anyone who announces a system of philosophy as his own work says in effect that before this philosophy there was none at all. For if he were willing to admit that there had been another (and a true) one, there would then be two different and true philosophies on the same subject, which is self-contradictory. - If, therefore, the critical philosophy calls itself a philosophy before which there had as yet been no philosophy at all, it does no more than has been done, will be done, and indeed must be done by anyone who draws up a philosophy on his own plan. (MM AA 06:206f.)

We see here a clear commitment to objectivity as a regulative ideal. Thus, the defense of objectivity is not a submission to an immutable and dogmatic truth, but a commitment that each philosopher must justify its metaphysical claims against the previous ones. Any overcoming cannot be done by means of tricks or detours, but should be based on addressing the limits and valid points set by previous philosophical enterprises.

In this sense, Kant claims that the first *Critique* “establishes a mode of thinking” (Prol, AA 04:383) that requires principles to be publicly justified for the philosophical community according to the idea of a Republic (see also CPR 766). He challenges every opponent

to prove in his own way any single truly metaphysical (i.e., synthetic, and cognized *a priori* from concepts) proposition he holds, and at best one of the most indispensable, such as the principle of the persistence of substance or of the necessary determination of the events in the world through their cause – but, as is fitting, to prove it on a priori grounds. (Prol, AA 04: 378)

Otherwise, if the opponent “can't do this (and silence is confession), then he must admit” it (Prol, AA 04: 378). The commitment with objectivity requires that the “*Critique* must either be accepted or a better one put in its place” (Prol, AA 04: 379), but it does not allow an alleged refutation without replacing it with a better and more complete project. The acceptance is not final, however, because anyone can always “express his reservations, indeed even his veto” (CPR B 766). Therefore, Kant does not claim that we must accept all the results of the *Critique* (as a theory), but anyone who wants to engage in metaphysics must be subjected to the critical demands of justifying synthetic a priori judgments. It is in this methodological sense, and not

as a stage of metaphysics, that we must understand the famous phrase: “The critical path alone is still open” (CPR B883).

Abstract: This paper reconstructs the premises and meaning of the final chapter of the first *Critique*, *The History of Pure Reason*. It argues that the project of a history of pure reason rests on the main arguments developed throughout the work, especially the idea of pure reason as an organized whole. It also claims that this philosophical history has a regulative status.

Keywords: History, Philosophy, Reason, Idea, Regulative Knowledge

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NOTAS / NOTES

¹ Professor of Modern Philosophy, Political Philosophy and Ethics at the Federal University of Paraná. Researcher at CNPq. This research was supported in different moments by CAPES, CNPq and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Brasil (CAPES) - Finance Code 001. This study was financed in part by CNPq - Finance Code 001. This paper is an revised and expanded version of a previous one (see Klein 2012).

² All translations are quoted from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (1992ff.) and follows the rules established by the Akademie Ausgabe. Kant, Immanuel (1900ff): *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.

³ See: In such a war there arise exactly as many pure concepts of the understanding, which apply to objects of intuition in general a priori, as there were logical functions of all possible judgments in the previous table: for the understanding is completely exhausted and its capacity entirely measured by these functions.” (CPR B 105), “The pure understanding (...) is therefore a unity that subsists on its own, which is sufficient by itself, and which is not to be supplemented by any external additions.” (CPR B 90).

⁴ “Knowledge” is understood here in a strong sense, i.e. linked to the concept of “truth”, not just in the sense of believing that you know something.

⁵ See Schnädelbach, 1983.

⁶ This topic will be discussed in the last section.

⁷ Cf. “I will content myself with casting a cursory glance from a merely transcendental point of view, namely that of nature of the pure reason, on the whole of its labors (...)” (CPR 880)

⁸ This can be seen in the following passages: “(...) the science whose final aim in all its preparations is directed properly only to the solution of these problems is called metaphysics, whose procedure is in the beginning dogmatic, i.e., it confidently takes on the execution of this task without an antecedent examination of the capacity or incapacity of reason for such a great undertaking.” (CPR B 7); “the uncritical dogmatist, who has not measured the sphere of his understanding and thus has not determined the boundaries of his possible cognition in accordance with principles, who therefore does not already know in advance how much he is capable of but thinks he can find it out through mere experiments (...)” (CPR B 796)

⁹ See: “For in mathematics reason succeeded in knowing a priori the constitution of things, well beyond all expectation of the philosophers; why should there not be just as much success in philosophy? As to the possibility of knowledge a priori, it did not strike the metaphysicians as a radical difference, to be treated as an important problem, that mathematics proceeds on the terrain of the sensory, since reason itself can construct concepts for it, i.e., present them a priori in intuition, and thus know the objects a priori, whereas philosophy undertakes an extension of reason’s knowledge by mere concepts, where its objects cannot, as in the other case, be set before us, since they hover, as it were, ahead of us in the air.” (FM AA 20:262) In the same way see also CPR B 8.

¹⁰ According to Kant, “A great part, perhaps the greatest part, of the business of our reason consists in analyses of the concepts that we already have of objects. This affords us a multitude of cognitions that, although they are nothing more than illuminations or clarifications of that which is already thought in our concepts (though still in a confused way), are, at least as far as their form is concerned, treasured as if they were new in sights, though they do not extend the concepts that we have in either matter or content, but only set them apart from each other. Now since this procedure does yield a real a priori cognition, which makes secure and useful progress, reason, without itself noticing it under these pretenses surreptitiously makes assertions of quite another sort, in which reason adds something entirely alien to given concepts and indeed does so a priori, without one knowing how it was able to do this and without such a question even being allowed to come to mind.” (CPR B 9f.)

¹¹ See: “It is, however, a customary fate of human reason in speculation to finish its edifice as early as possible and only then to investigate whether the ground has been adequately prepared for it. But at that point all sorts of excuses will be sought to assure us of its sturdiness or to refuse such a late and dangerous examination.” (CPR B9)

¹² See: Skepticism “is at best only a means for awaking it [Dogmatic] from its sweet dogmatic dreams in order to undertake a more careful examination of its condition. Since, however, this skeptical manner of withdrawing from a tedious quarrel of reason seems to be the shortcut, as it were, for arriving at enduring philosophical tranquility, or at least the high road that is happily recommended by those who would give a philosophical appearance to a scornful contempt for all investigations of this kind, I find it necessary to exhibit this manner of thought in its true light.” (CPR B785) “All skeptical polemicizing is properly directed only against the dogmatist, who continues gravely along his path without any mistrust of his original objective principles, i.e., without critique, in order to unhinge his concept and bring him to self-knowledge.” (CPR B791)

¹³ See: “Without this [the critique of pure reason], reason is as it were in the state of nature, and it cannot make its assertions and claims valid or secure them except through *war*. The critique, on the contrary, which derives all decisions from the ground-rules of its own constitution, whose authority no one can doubt, grants us the peace of a state of law, in which we should not conduct our controversy except by *due process*. What brings the quarrel in the state of nature to an end is a *victory*, of which both sides boast, although for the most part there follows only an uncertain peace, arranged by an authority in the middle; but in the state of law it is the verdict, which, since it goes to the origin of the controversies themselves, must secure a perpetual peace. And the endless controversies of a merely dogmatic reason finally make it necessary to seek peace in some sort of critique of this reason itself, and in a legislation grounded upon it; just as Hobbes asserted, the state of nature is a state of injustice and violence, and one must necessarily leave it in order to submit himself to the lawful coercion which alone limits our freedom in such a way that it can be consistent with the freedom of everyone else and thereby with the common good.” (CPR B779f.)

¹⁴ Here I generally share some of Pollok’s position about the normativity of reason (Pollok 2017). But I develop a constructivist reading of the CPR in Klein (2023).

¹⁵ For a discussion about the legitimacy of the essay *Idea* published in 1784 in the context of the first critique see Klein 2014.

Recebido / Received: 07.01.2024

Aceito / Accepted: 29.01.2024