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**Kant's Transcendental Idealism and the Boundaries of
Metaphysics**

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List of Abbreviations

Except for references to the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, all references to Kant's writings are to the *Akademie-Ausgabe* of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin: de Gruyter, followed by the number of volume and page, separated by a colon (e.g. AA 20:260). The *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* is cited with reference to the pagination of the first (A) and second (B) edition (e.g. A 813 / B 841). All translations are from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The following abbreviations are used to refer to Kant's works.

<i>KrV</i>	<i>Kritik der reinen Vernunft (Critique of Pure Reason)</i>
<i>Prol</i>	<i>Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können (Prolegomena to any future metaphysics that will be able to come forward as a science)</i>
<i>KpV</i>	<i>Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (Critique of Practical Reason)</i>
<i>KU</i>	<i>Kritik der Urteilskraft (Critique of the Power of Judgment)</i>

Introduction

The most crucial concerns giving rise to this research might, to some extent, be condensed in three fundamental questions: what does it mean to acknowledge a limit to human knowledge? What exactly can human reason know within that boundary? To what extent can theoretical reason legitimately reach out to what lies beyond the limit of an experience possible for us? These issues, in the context of Kant's position within the scope of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, assume the form of a cardinal problem: the problem of metaphysics, consisting in the decision of its very possibility or impossibility in general and in the determination of its "sources", "extent" and "boundaries"¹, so as to assign it its most proper scope.

Metaphysics is, for Kant, "the science of progressing by reason from knowledge of the sensible to that of the super-sensible". In the objects of this science lies the greatest interest of human reason, an interest which is such that "all men are more or less engaged in it"; what is ultimately at stake in this science is "indeed the only purpose which reason can ever look up to in its speculation"². With respect to the "final aim" of metaphysics, concerning "the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God"³, the interest of reason is first and foremost practical, because it is related to our moral destination as human beings; at the same time, however, there is also a lively and ineradicable theoretical interest in what transcends the limit of possible experience. An interest that, once nurtured and corrected by the critical work, no longer results in immodest claims of knowledge of the unconditioned, hindering our moral destination, but rather provides support and backing for the latter, and works as a legitimate counterpart to the practical interest.

The attraction for these aspects has, in the process of framing the theme of the present work, taken the shape of an exploration of the space of the limit along which human reason seems to operate in its activity, by moving along a twofold directory. On the one hand, the laborious, critical work of tracing and establishing its own boundaries by exploring its structures and faculties; on the other, the desire, never fully satisfied, but

¹ A xii.

² For this and previous quotations: AA 20:259-60.

³ A 798 / B 826.

inherent in its very essence, to overcome them. Unable to eradicate this cognitive tension, we cannot but, holding firmly onto the established barrier, cast our gaze over the limit, with the critical consciousness of the ineliminable risk of tumbling into the “broad and stormy ocean” of “illusion”⁴.

Kant’s thought, indeed, was found to be a place where, to the highest degree and in a masterful way, a philosophy of finitude also becomes a philosophy of transcendence: the fascination and, at the same time, the complexity of Kant’s position lies in its majestic capacity to reconcile a radical acceptance of the finitude of human reason with a simultaneous valorization of its peculiar potentiality towards transcendence. In Kant, two opposing tendencies, equally harmful without the intervention of critique, seem to be balanced in an organic position: on the one hand, Kant curbs the immodest claims of reason to “objectify” the unconditioned with the pretension of knowing it; on the other hand, he also opposes the skeptical mistrust of reason’s possibilities of obtaining any metaphysical knowledge or approaching in any way the supersensible.

On one side, therefore, Kant is to all intents and purposes a thinker of the Enlightenment: he places the utmost and fullest trust and value in reason and its cognitive potential, by recognizing in it “the final touchstone of truth”⁵. On the other side, however, he also recognizes the role of reason itself in carrying us to the furthest limit of its own possibilities, hinting at the supersensible. This happens by necessity, as the culmination of an inevitable path: it is not by accident that reason conducts us beyond experience, but rather this tendency is rooted in its need to transcend the boundaries of the sensible world in search of the unconditioned. The enlightened confidence in the potentialities of reason is therefore not, in Kant, synonymous with a mere reduction of reality to a self-evident world of experience: hence the intricacy and richness of the Kantian position. Faith in reason also means, ultimately, faith in the path along which it leads us: thus, a critical acknowledgment of an “*an sich*” as further and grounding with respect to phenomenal reality and a rightful relocation, safe from the “devastations” of a “lawless speculative reason”⁶, of the objects of the “highest interest”⁷ for mankind.

⁴ A 235 / B 295.

⁵ AA 08:141.

⁶ A 849 / B 877.

⁷ A 744 / B 772.

In line with these overall considerations, this work is meant to investigate the role of the *KrV* as an inquiry essentially concerned with the possibility of metaphysics, against the tendency, spread by neo-Kantianism, to interpret the *KrV* as merely providing a theory of experience aimed at establishing a ground for positive sciences. In Kant's own conception, "criticism" is rather "the preparatory activity for the advancement of metaphysics as a well-grounded science"⁸. A first, main purpose of this work will thus consist in highlighting the positive result of the first *Critique*, mainly implying the effective possibility of a reform of metaphysics both in its *generalis* section and in its *specialis* section. Furthermore, another fundamental aim of this investigation will comprise the exploration of a potential rational extension of the boundaries within which reason is confined, surveying the possibility, outlined by the Kantian discussion of the concept of *Fürwahrhalten*, of different epistemic modalities, alternative to proper knowledge and yet legitimate insofar as satisfying the metaphysical need of human reason.

Targeting these main goals, the first Chapter of the present work will be dedicated, in the first place, to reconstructing the ultimate reasons behind Kant's critical turn in his thinking. The very core of this transformation will be identified in the acknowledgement of a limit to the possibilities of knowledge for human reason, entailing both epistemological and practical consequences. In fact, his concerns with respect to metaphysics will be shown to be not only theoretical, but also moral, since ultimately motivated by the wish to remove the impediments to the final destination of mankind. The necessity to undertake an analysis of the motivations for this conversion will take the shape of a brief survey of the "critical path" that led Kant to the development of the main insights of the *KrV* through an increasingly tight confrontation with the metaphysics of his predecessors. In light of this purpose, special attention will be given to two main pre-critical writings, namely the *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770 and a well-known letter sent to Markus Herz in February 1772, representing crucial steps forward towards his mature, critical position. The key role played by these works in the more general context of Kant's decade-long attempt to provide metaphysics with the "secure course of a science"⁹ will be pointed out: on the one hand, the elements of agreement between them and the

⁸ B xxxvi.

⁹ Ibid.

subsequent *KrV* will be underlined; on the other, the divergent features, indicative of a still ongoing elaboration by Kant of his new theoretical approach, will be pointed out. A second fundamental aim of this Chapter will consist in highlighting the pivotal role of transcendental idealism, as the outcome of Kant's critical turn, in providing a novel foundation to the problem of metaphysics. In the attempt to reach an adequate interpretation of this revolutionary philosophical position, an analysis of the core thesis of this doctrine will be carried out, i.e., the transcendental distinction between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich*. The fundamental idea guiding this survey will be that this "critical" teaching is essentially motivated by the necessity to acknowledge the limitation of human reason's cognitive possibility, resulting therefore in an unavoidable ignorance with respect to the domain of things in themselves. To grasp the key features of this doctrine, an overview of some issues concerning its proper interpretation will be undertaken; first and foremost, the debate opposing an epistemological reading of Kant's position to a metaphysical one will be specifically addressed in the attempt to grasp some efficacious lines of interpretation. Furthermore, a strategy to dissolve the sharp polarization of this debate will be explored, aiming at showing how Kant, through the transcendental distinction, intended to distinguish two different approaches towards the objects we encounter within experience (as they appear to us and as they are in themselves) *as well as* to identify a class of entities which, in contrast, can only be thought by the intellect alone and coherently cannot, under any circumstances, be considered as appearances. It is precisely with regard to these entities that the possibility of thought arises, even though that of knowledge is lacking: this possibility will be briefly explored, hinting a further space for reason in its metaphysical speculations, as long as it abandons its claims of knowledge with respect to the domain of the supersensible and sticks to a purely intellectual activity.

The second Chapter of the work will therefore deal more specifically with the role of the *KrV* with respect to the possibilities of metaphysics. Through the fulfillment of the critical task, Kant intended to provide the foundations of a successful, scientific metaphysics: his project in the first *Kritik*, therefore, does not merely consist in a *pars destruens*, aimed at submitting to criticism the mistakes of traditional metaphysics, but also and above all in a worthy *pars construens* in which Kant collects the results of his effort to operate a reform of this discipline. An attempt will be made to show that the

exposition of the conditions of possibility of experience in the *KrV* is not an end in itself, but a means to the end goal of clarifying the conditions under which metaphysics can become a science. The role of the critique in relation to this intent will be explored, shedding light on the passages where Kant presents the *KrV* as a “propaedeutic”¹⁰ or a “doctrine of method”¹¹ for a future metaphysics *qua* system of purely intellectual cognitions. In more detail, it will be shown how the reform project carried out by Kant is directed towards a twofold target. On the one hand, it is headed towards former *metaphysica generalis*, i.e., ontology, which will now be reconceived as transcendental philosophy, namely a science, partially carried out in the *KrV* itself, dealing with the conditions of possibility of human reason’s cognition; coherently, as famously stated by Kant, “the proud name of an ontology” must now “give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding”¹². On the other hand, the project is also geared towards traditional *metaphysica specialis*, conceived by Kant as dealing with the “ultimate purpose”¹³ of metaphysics itself insofar as it concerns the highest objects of reason’s speculation: this science, now relying on the basis of transcendental philosophy, can legitimately conduct its activity inasmuch as it abandons its “objectifying” tendency with respect to the entities of its domain, accepting that its research does not result in any positive knowledge. Special attention will therefore be dedicated to the fact that both branches of metaphysics seem to find their scope of legitimacy, provided that they abandon their knowledge claims as soon as they cross the boundaries of a possible experience. Furthermore, a closer look at the constructive side of the *Transcendental Dialectic* will reveal the positive role of the transcendental ideas of reason: although they themselves cannot amount to any knowledge, nonetheless, in their regulative use, they contribute irreplaceably to the advancement of knowledge itself, pushing reason to the extreme boundaries of possible experience by hinting at what lies beyond them. This vital activity carried out by metaphysical thinking seems therefore to disclose new and valuable possibilities for theoretical reason.

Lastly, the third and final Chapter of the present work will be guided and motivated by the attempt to make sense of Kant’s renowned statement in the second

¹⁰ A 11 / B 25. See also B xliii, A 52 / B 76, A 841 / B 869, A 850 / B 878.

¹¹ A 83 / B 109.

¹² A 247 / B 303.

¹³ AA 20:260.

Preface of the *KrV*, according to which he “had to deny *knowledge* [*Wissen*] in order to make room for *faith* [*Glauben*]”¹⁴. This inquiry will therefore be dedicated to the investigation of alternative epistemic modalities compared to knowledge, revealed by the Kantian survey of the concept of *Fürwahrhalten* in the *Canon of Pure Reason*. This notion encompasses the various possibilities for reason to relate to a certain epistemic content which it holds to be a true representation of reality. The possible role of different forms of rational assent in expanding the boundaries within which reason is constrained will be examined. In light of this aim, the forms of *Meinen*, *Wissen* and *Glauben* will be explored, together with the notions of objective and subjective sufficiency and insufficiency through which such epistemic modalities are defined. More specifically, the role of *doktrinaler Glaube* will be investigated in view of its possibility to represent an additional resource through which theoretical reason can, to some extent, reach beyond its epistemic limitation to the domain of possible experience. As the outcome of a non-epistemic justification, thereby still possessing sufficiency, albeit merely “subjective”, doctrinal Belief might in fact provide new possibilities of investigation in the context of merely theoretical issues with respect to which knowledge is essentially precluded for us, since they lie beyond the boundaries of experience. Furthermore, a possible relationship between this form of theoretical assent and the regulative use of ideas will be analyzed, in the attempt to discover a possible overlap of the scopes of these two forms of rational investigation that both seem to lead reason to the very limits of its own possibilities.

¹⁴ B xxx.

Chapter 1

The Critical Turn and Transcendental Idealism

It is a strange fate of the human understanding, whether through a natural tendency or the true interest that drives it, to become entangled in a science, and to see itself as it were as condemned to it, which after centuries of efforts by the concerted power of the sharpest minds cannot be carried forward even a single step. If we would (unwillingly) give up the effort, then [...] we are in part pulled back by the natural movement of our spirit, in part we are stuck everywhere by questions with regard to our most important concern, regarding which we cannot be satisfied except by means of our own insight in this field. I know of only a single science of this sort for the good fortune of humankind, namely metaphysics, a theoretical philosophy of pure reason, i.e., reason free from all sources in experience; it is the stone of *Sisyphus*, which one ceaselessly rolls without ever moving it from its resting place.¹

Before true philosophy can come to life, the old one must destroy itself.²

Through the years preceding the publication of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in 1781, Kant's thought underwent a series of substantial changes, leading him to the development of the position he fully expressed in that work. These developments have to do with his increasingly tight confrontation with the philosophy of his predecessors, in particular with rationalist metaphysics: it is possible to observe Kant's progressive departure from crucial tenets of rationalism, corresponding to the ongoing elaboration of an autonomous position, culminating in the *KrV*. The process through such transformations can be seen as a "critical turn" in his thought, i.e., as the emergence of his critical philosophy; this way, it is possible for readers to single out a "pre-critical" and a "critical" phase of his works. On a closer reading, however, this sharp distinction should give way to a less clear-cut reading, allowing one to appreciate the graduality of the evolution of problems and solutions with which Kant has been tackling for decades.

The first aim of this chapter is to reconstruct the ultimate reasons that drove Kant to such a transformation and to highlight the key points marking pivotal steps towards the definitive position that he reached with the *KrV*, i.e., transcendental idealism. By going through the problems Kant was facing, it will be argued that the core of the critical turn

¹ AA 18:93.

² AA 10:57. Kant to Lambert, December 31, 1765.

lies in the acknowledgement of a limit to the claims of human knowledge. However, even though the motivations behind this shift are substantially epistemological, it will be shown that Kant's efforts to bring about a "revolution" in philosophy are grounded by an even more fundamental concern: the wish to remove every obstacle to the possibility of the realization of man's moral destination. Coherently, the nature of Kant's main interest in bringing metaphysics on "the secure path of a science"³ will be shown to be practical at heart. In briefly retracing the path that led Kant to the critical turn, attention will be driven towards the *Inaugural Dissertation* from 1770 and the letter Kant sent to Markus Herz in February 1772: through a comparison with the *Transcendental Aesthetic* of the *KrV* as in the first edition, therefore adopting the standpoint of the fully "critical" Kant, both elements of agreement and divergent features will be highlighted, indicative of a still ongoing elaboration of his new theoretic approach.

The second main aim of this chapter will be to highlight the crucial role of transcendental idealism, as the outcome of Kant's critical turn, in overcoming the issues that traditional metaphysics had caused. In the attempt to reach an adequate interpretation of this revolutionary position, an analysis of the core thesis of transcendental idealism will be carried out, namely the distinction between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich*, and some interpretative issues concerning it will be addressed. Most significant is the debate between an epistemological interpretation of Kant's position (according to which the transcendental distinction only singles out "two aspects" by which we can represent one and the same object) and a metaphysical interpretation (according to the idea of "two worlds", i.e., of two ontologically different kinds of entities). Furthermore, a strategy to dissolve the sharp polarization of such debate will be presented, aiming at showing how Kant intends both to distinguish two different approaches towards the objects we encounter in experience (as they appear to us and as they are in themselves), and to identify a class of entities which, in contrast, can only be thought by the intellect and therefore cannot, under any circumstances, be considered as appearances. It is precisely about these entities that the possibility of thought, even though not of knowledge, arises, opening up new possibilities for a metaphysics that is well aware of its scope and limits and does not fall into dogmatic errors because of its boundless claims of knowledge.

³ B ix.

1.1 The Critical Turn

The “critical turn” impressed by Kant to his philosophy consists in the process through which he reaches criticism. In his conception, criticism brings about a much needed “revolution in the way of thinking [*Revolution der Denkart*]”⁴, which is urgent in the face of all errors caused by dogmatist metaphysics, resulting in dissensions of reason with itself. Kant spells out the opposition between his criticism and dogmatism in the following words:

Criticism is not opposed to the dogmatic procedure of reason in its pure cognition as science (for science must always be dogmatic, i.e. it must prove its conclusions strictly a priori from secure principles); rather, it is opposed only to dogmatism, i.e., to 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*.⁵

After metaphysics ventured down the routes of dogmatism, skepticism, empiricism and eventually took refuge in indifferentism, now is finally the time for the “prelude” to its “incipient transformation [*Umschaffung*] and enlightenment [*Aufklärung*]”⁶: according to Kant, “the *critical* path alone is still open”⁷, it is “the only one left”⁸ in the attempt to remove those mistakes in which reason, proceeding dogmatically since lacking critique, would necessarily fall into. As seen, Kant presents his work as introducing a “change in the ways of thinking”⁹ analogous to that which occurred in mathematics and natural science, whose advantageous results are depicted in the previous pages. Accordingly, the aim of the critique is explicitly the following:

Now the concern of this critique of pure speculative reason consists in the attempt to transform the accepted procedure of metaphysics, undertaking an entire revolution [*Revolution*] according to the example of the geometers and natural scientists.¹⁰

⁴ B xii.

⁵ B xxxv.

⁶ A x.

⁷ A 856 / B 884.

⁸ A xii.

⁹ B xvi.

¹⁰ B xxii.

It is precisely through the example of natural sciences that Kant introduces the necessity of an analogue of the “Copernican revolution” in philosophy. Just as Copernicus, trying to explain the celestial motions, revolutionized natural science by proposing that it was the spectator that revolved around the sun, and not the celestial host that revolved around the observer, in the same way Kant is ready to impress a change in metaphysics by exploring a similar path “regarding the intuition of objects [*Anschauung der Gegenstände*]”¹¹. In the new, critical perspective, it is not the intuition that is required to conform to objects: if this were the case, it would be impossible to explain how we know something *a priori* about the intuition itself¹². Rather, it is the opposite: the object must, somehow, conform “to the constitution of our faculty of intuition”¹³ in order for it to be possible to explain the possibility of *a priori* knowledge. In obtaining proper cognition, the same is supposed to happen with concepts (*Begriffe*): it is the objects of experience that must conform to our concepts, and not (as it has always been presupposed) the other way around. In Kant’s famous words:

Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us.¹⁴

What exactly is the outcome of Kant’s *Kopernikanische Wende*? Consequences of this change are so vast that the entire critical philosophy is grounded on them. The very doctrine of transcendental idealism, indeed, can be seen as an expression of this radical shift of perspective¹⁵. If it was the subject to conform to the nature of the object, in fact, first of all it would be hard for him to tell that his representations *actually* correspond to an object, because there would be no definite transcendental conditions governing the correspondence between the cognizer’s representations and the objects themselves; transcendental philosophy, instead, displays the conditions under which something can

¹¹ B xvii.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ B xvi.

¹⁵ I will deal with Kant’s transcendental idealism in Section 1.2.

become an object of cognition for us. Furthermore, without the assumption of the “Copernican revolution”, all cognition would be *a posteriori*, meaning that there would not even be epistemic conditions, peculiar to us human cognizers, about which to have *a priori* cognition (since, in a word, there could be no transcendental cognition¹⁶ about those conditions). Kant’s *Kopernikanische Wende*, instead, requires us to switch our starting point and to assume the perspective of the epistemic subject, reflecting on himself: this subject has transcendental conditions of knowledge that are in themselves independent of the object, so that it is rather the latter that must conform to those conditions in order to become for us an object of possible experience. Rather than simply pointing to a reality that is completely mind-independent, in transcendental philosophy the notion of an object (*Gegenstand*, *Objekt*, *Ding*) needs to be reconfigured¹⁷. It is precisely because something, in order to become an object of possible experience for us, must conform to the transcendental conditions of our cognition, that the transcendental philosopher must teach, through the critique, “that the object [*Objekt*] should be taken in a *twofold meaning* [*zweierlei Bedeutung*], namely as appearance [*Erscheinung*] or as thing in itself [*Ding an sich selbst*]¹⁸. It is now evident how the fundamental thesis of transcendental idealism, i.e., the distinction between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich*¹⁹, is grounded in Kant’s critical turn in philosophy: “the distinction [*Unterscheidung*] between things as objects of experience [*Gegenstände der Erfahrung*] and the very same things as things in themselves [*Dinge an sich selbst*]” has been “made necessary” by “our critique”²⁰. The objects we encounter within experience, the ones we can cognize, are not the things in themselves, but rather the objects of an experience possible for us, meaning those objects that conform to the transcendental conditions of our cognition: in a word, they are appearances. From

¹⁶ According to Kant’s definition as in the second edition: “I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible *a priori*.” (B 25). A very effective definition of “transcendental” to explain the role of this notion in Kant’s system is provided by Frederick C. Beiser in the following words: “This normative order is neither mental nor physical but transcendental, the necessary condition for the possibility of experience of any rational being equipped with a human sensibility.” (Beiser, 2002, p. 138).

¹⁷ For a more detailed account of Kant’s dissection of the notion of object, see de Boer (2020), pp. 101-126. The author’s thesis is that Kant’s introduction of terms such as “thing in itself”, “transcendental object”, “noumenon” serves the purpose of clarifying the notion of a thing, which had remained too ambiguous in former (particularly Wolffian) metaphysics. Each of these expressions acquires its own specific function in Kant’s system. I will return in more detail on this issue in Section 1.2.3.

¹⁸ B xxvii.

¹⁹ I will deal in more detail with transcendental idealism in Section 1.2 and with the interpretation of the “transcendental distinction” in Section 1.2.1.

²⁰ B xxvii.

this follows that “we can have cognition of no object as a thing in itself, but only insofar as it is an object [*Objekt*] of sensible intuition, i.e. as an appearance”²¹.

The achievement of this new perspective, however, was not attainable by previous philosophers, because it requires precisely the implementation of the critical task: “criticism”, in fact, “is the preparatory activity necessary for the advancement of metaphysics as a well-grounded science”²². Even those philosophers who had come close to bringing metaphysics on the path of a science, like Christian Wolff²³ or Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten²⁴, could never complete the task because they were lacking critique. With Kant’s critical philosophy, reason is finally called to

take on anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge and to institute a court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims while dismissing all its groundless pretensions, and this not by mere decrees but according to its own eternal and unchangeable laws; and this court is none other than the *critique of pure reason* itself.²⁵

The *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* is therefore “a critique of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive independently of all experience”²⁶. At this court, reason is called upon to be both the defendant and the judge: it subjects itself to its own judgement because it is required to analyze its boundaries and limits, determined by its transcendental structures and their functioning. In a nutshell, “reason must subject itself to critique in all its undertakings”²⁷, and without critique it “is as it were in the state of nature”²⁸. This “preparatory (propaedeutic) critique of reason”²⁹ is the only condition under which the fundamental problem of the *KrV* can be tackled, namely “the decision about the possibility or impossibility of a metaphysics in general, and the determination of its sources, as well as its extent and boundaries, all,

²¹ B xxvi.

²² B xxxvi.

²³ Kant gives Wolff, “the greatest among all dogmatic philosophers”, credit for having given “us the first example [...] of the way in which the secure course of a science is to be taken [...]; for these reasons he had the skills for moving a science such as metaphysics into this condition, if only it had occurred to him to prepare the field for it by a critique of the organ, namely pure reason itself” (B xxxvi).

²⁴ In a private note (R5081) dated 1776-1778 Kant refers to Baumgarten as “a Cyclops among metaphysicians, who was missing one eye, namely critique” (AA 18:82).

²⁵ A xi-xii.

²⁶ A xii.

²⁷ A 738 / B 766.

²⁸ A 751 / B 779.

²⁹ A 850 / B 878.

however, from principles”³⁰. As Kant’s words make clear, “the chief question always remains: ‘What and how much can understanding and reason cognize free of all experience?’”³¹, i.e., how is metaphysics as a science possible?

To be able to become a science, however, metaphysics had to establish a new and different footing for the issues that prevented it from taking a safe path. As mentioned earlier, those were problems with which Kant had been struggling for a while, before eventually achieving their solution in the *KrV*. Without any “preposterous and immodest”³² claim, he announces in the 1781 *Preface* that “there cannot be a single metaphysical problem that has not been solved here, or at least to the solution of which the key has not been provided”³³. On the path of critique, Kant is confident that he has

succeeded in removing all those errors that have so far put reason into dissension with itself in its nonexperiential use. I have not avoided reason’s questions by pleading the incapacity of human reason as an excuse; rather I have completely specified these questions according to principles, and after discovering the point where reason has misunderstood itself, I have resolved them to reason’s full satisfaction.³⁴

The reason behind Kant’s confidence in this outcome lies in a distinctive feature peculiar to transcendental philosophy: it has “the special property that there is no question at all dealing with an object given by pure reason that is insoluble by this very same human reason”³⁵.

1.1.1 Why Criticism?

What exactly were the problems with which former metaphysics was entangled and which were of utmost concern for Kant? As is well known, the most significant metaphysical issues Kant had to deal with are systematized in the *Transcendental Dialectic* of the *KrV*. The *Dialectic* is engaged in demystifying the mistakes of traditional metaphysics, tracing each of them back to a fundamental error: the ignorance of the epistemic limitation of human knowledge, and therefore the violation of its boundaries,

³⁰ A xii.

³¹ A xvii.

³² A xiv.

³³ A xiii.

³⁴ A xii.

³⁵ A 477 / B 505.

resulting in claims of knowledge extending beyond the borders of possible experience. More specifically, Kant's diagnosis shows that the traditional and (apparently) unsolvable problems of metaphysics stem from a misuse of reason in dialectical inferences. Due to reason's natural tendency to overcome the limits of the understanding, in the attempt to reach the highest unity of knowledge³⁶, it entangles into "*transcendent* principles [*transzendente Grundsätze*]" which "fly beyond" the "limits of possible experience"³⁷, giving rise to syllogisms which contain, in their conclusion, the origin of transcendental ideas. The latter are natural ("grounded in the nature of human reason"³⁸) and necessary, insofar as they guide the progress of knowledge in the empirical world (according to their *regulative* use). Through the paralogisms, the antinomies and the ideal of pure reason, three classes of transcendental ideas arise: that of the absolute unity of the thinking subject, that of the absolute unity of the series of conditions of appearance and that of the absolute unity of the condition of all objects of thought in general³⁹. Accordingly, pure reason provides the three disciplines of *metaphysica specialis* with their objects: the soul is the object of *psychologia rationalis*, the world as a whole is the object of *cosmologia rationalis* and God is the object of *theologia transcendentalis*⁴⁰. Traditional metaphysics is precisely charged by Kant of claiming to obtain *a priori* cognition of these objects, and this condition is referred to as to a "transcendental illusion",

³⁶ Cf. A 305 / B 361. The attempt to reach the highest unity is a distinctive feature of the faculty of reason: "If the understanding may be a faculty of unity of appearances by means of rules, then reason is the faculty of the unity of the rules of understanding under principles. Thus it never applies directly to experience or to any object, but instead applies to the understanding, in order to give unity *a priori* through concepts to the understanding's manifold cognitions, which may be called 'the unity of reason', and is of an altogether different kind than any unity that can be achieved by the understanding" (A 302 / B 359). In more detail, reason proceeds as follows: "From this we see that reason, in inferring, seeks to bring the greatest manifold of cognition of the understanding to the smallest number of principles (universal conditions), and thereby to effect the highest unity of that manifold." (A 305 / B 361). This happens because "In fact the manifold of rules and the unity of principles is a demand of reason, in order to bring the understanding into thoroughgoing connection with itself" (A 305 / B 362).

³⁷ A 296 / B 352. Kant is here accurate in distinguishing the meaning of "transcendent" from that of "transcendental": while the *transcendental* use of categories is "a mere mistake of the faculty of judgment when it is not properly checked by criticism, and thus does not attend enough to the boundaries of the territory in which alone the pure understanding is allowed its play", by *transcendent* principles he means "principles that actually incite us to tear down all those boundary posts and to lay claim to a wholly new territory that recognizes no demarcations anywhere. Hence *transcendental* and *transcendent* are not the same"; the meaning of *transcendent* is therefore opposed to *immanent*, since immanent principles are "the principles whose application stays wholly and completely within the limits of possible experience" (A 295-296 / B 352-353).

³⁸ A 323 / B 380.

³⁹ Cf. A 334 / B 391.

⁴⁰ Cf. A 334-335 / B 391-392.

which influences principles whose use is not ever meant for experience, since in that case we would at least have a touchstone for their correctness, but which instead, contrary to all the warnings of criticism, carries us away beyond the empirical use of the categories, and holds out to us the semblance of extending the pure understanding.⁴¹

In more detail, the transcendental illusion lies in the transition from the *regulative* use⁴² of the abovementioned ideas to their *constitutive* use, namely, in mistaking subjective principles (i.e., principles that guide our search for knowledge) for objective principles (i.e., principles that truly describe reality in itself): in short, the error lies in thinking that reality in itself has the same structure as the one we attribute to it⁴³.

The place where the contradictions in which reason falls are displayed to the highest degree, however, is the *Antinomy of Pure Reason*: “here a new phenomenon of human reason shows itself, namely a wholly natural antithetic [*Antithetik*], [...] into which reason falls for itself and even unavoidably”⁴⁴. Following a natural tendency, reason requires, for a given conditioned, an absolute totality of conditions, as its supreme principle demands: “*if the conditioned is given, then the whole sum of conditions, and hence the absolutely unconditioned, is also given*, through which alone the conditioned was possible”⁴⁵. Through this natural procedure, reason seeks to “free a concept of the understanding from the unavoidable limitations of a possible experience”, and to “extend it beyond the boundaries of the empirical”⁴⁶; the outcome of this course is systematized by Kant in the table of cosmological ideas, derived with a systematic procedure⁴⁷. Through the antithetic of pure reason, he effectively displays the contradictions that reason inevitably encounters when it claims to possess knowledge beyond possible

⁴¹ A 295 / B 352.

⁴² I will return on the regulative use of ideas in Section 2.3.2. and in Section 3.3.2.

⁴³ This mistake is traced back by Kant to the false presupposition of transcendental realism, “which regards space and time as something given in themselves (independent of our sensibility)”; furthermore, transcendental realism “represents outer appearances (if their reality is concerned) as things in themselves, which would exist independently of us and our sensibility and thus would also be outside us according to pure concepts of the understanding.” (A 369). For a comprehensive account of transcendental illusion and its relation with transcendental realism, see Willaschek, 2018, pp. 243-251.

⁴⁴ A 407 / B 433-4.

⁴⁵ A 409 / B 436. This happens because “for a given conditioned reason demands an absolute totality on the side of the conditions [...], thereby making the category into a transcendental idea, in order to give absolute completeness to the empirical synthesis through its progress toward the unconditioned (which is never met with in experience, but only in the idea)” (ibid.).

⁴⁶ A 409 / B 435.

⁴⁷ The method followed for the identification of cosmological ideas consists of following the table of categories and identifying among them “those that necessarily carry with them a series in the synthesis of the manifold” (A 415 / B 442).

experience: in doing so, he organizes into four pairs of theses and antitheses the contrasting philosophical positions that, in the “battlefield” represented by traditional metaphysics, have been the protagonists of these “endless controversies”⁴⁸. The distinctive feature of the antinomies is the absence of the “ascription of a preeminent claim to approval of one side or the other”⁴⁹. Since both the thesis and the antithesis of these pairs are free of contradiction and meet the conditions of their necessity in the nature of reason itself⁵⁰, the issues they tackle appear, therefore, to be undecidable.

These sophisticated assertions thus open up a dialectical battlefield, where each party will keep the upper hand as long as it is allowed to attack, and will certainly defeat that which is compelled to conduct itself merely defensively. [...] One can easily imagine that from time immemorial this arena has often been entered, both sides gaining many victories, but that each time the final victory was decisive merely because care was taken that the champion of the good cause held the field alone, his opponent having been forbidden to take up his weapons again.⁵¹

Kant therefore presents “four natural and unavoidable problems of reason”⁵²:

The questions whether the world has a beginning and its extension in space a boundary; whether there is anywhere, perhaps in my thinking self, an indivisible and indestructible unity, or whether there is nothing but that which is divisible and perishable; whether my actions are free or, like those of other beings, controlled by the strings of nature and fate; whether, finally, there is a supreme cause of the world, or whether natural things and their order constitute the ultimate object, at which all our consideration of things must stop – these are questions for whose solution the mathematician would gladly give up his entire science; for that science cannot give him any satisfaction *in regard to the highest and most important ends of humanity*.⁵³

In its privilege of tackling these questions, philosophy exhibits a great “dignity”, because they concern “the ultimate ends in which all reason’s efforts must finally unite”⁵⁴; they are questions that “every human reason must necessarily come up against in the course of its progress”⁵⁵. Kant’s solution of the antinomies lies the dissolution of the

⁴⁸ A viii.

⁴⁹ A 420 / B 448.

⁵⁰ Cf. A 421 / B 449.

⁵¹ A 422-423 / B 450-451.

⁵² A 462 / B 490.

⁵³ A 463-464 / B 491-492, my emphasis.

⁵⁴ A 463 / B 491.

⁵⁵ A 422 / B 449.

cosmological dialectic through the means provided by his transcendental idealism: by distinguishing “between the ways one might take the reality of objects of sense”⁵⁶, it is possible to unmask the transcendental illusion underlying these conflicts, although never permanently (unlike logical illusion), since it “does not cease even though it is uncovered and its nullity is clearly seen into by transcendental criticism”⁵⁷. Notwithstanding criticism, which made it aware of its limitations, reason remains haunted by these questions.

Not by chance, in fact, this is the capital problem Kant famously mentions at the very opening of his work:

Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason.⁵⁸

Why is it that reason is necessarily driven towards those problems by its very nature? Where does this necessity lie? This urgency is rooted in reason’s need to transcend the sensible world and to approach the unconditioned in order to find answers to those questions that, from a strictly theoretical point of view, could only remain unanswered. Besides the theoretical interest, indeed, it is most of all the practical⁵⁹ interest of reason to guide its extension beyond the limits of experience: the “highest and most important ends of humanity”⁶⁰ mentioned by Kant in the passage quoted above are made explicit in the *Canon of Pure Reason*.

The final aim to which in the end the speculation of reason in its transcendental use is directed concerns three objects: the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God.⁶¹

⁵⁶ A 496-497 / B 525.

⁵⁷ A 297 / B 353. As Kant adds: “The cause of this is that in our reason [...] there lie fundamental rules and maxims for its use, which look entirely like objective principles, and through them it comes about that the subjective necessity of a certain connection of our concepts on behalf of the understanding is taken for an objective necessity, the determination of things in themselves” (ibid.).

⁵⁸ A vii.

⁵⁹ According to Kant’s definition in the *Canon of Pure Reason*, “practical” is everything “that is possible through freedom” (A 800 / B 828).

⁶⁰ A 464 / B 492.

⁶¹ A 798 / B 826.

The objects of the major philosophical disputes, dealt with by *metaphysica specialis*, are therefore so relevant and indispensable to reason, due to its practical interest, that its questions on them can never find an end, even when its attempts to reach the unconditioned have been proven to be theoretically unwarranted⁶².

Kant's decade-long efforts to bring metaphysics on a safer path are now clarified by a more fundamental, radical motivation: the attempt to preserve the supreme ends of humanity, by rescuing them from the omnipresent trap of both dogmatism and skepticism. It is precisely the task of criticism, therefore, to rectify those mistakes of metaphysics that lead to the tendency to "objectifying" its objects⁶³. In the clearest words of the second *Preface*:

Thus I cannot even *assume God, freedom and immortality* for the sake of the necessary practical use of my reason unless I simultaneously *deprive* speculative reason of its pretension to extravagant insights; because in order to attain to such insights, speculative reason would have to help itself to principles that in fact reach only to objects of possible experience, and which, if they were to be applied to what cannot be an object of experience, then they would always actually transform it into an appearance, and thus declare all *practical extension* of pure reason to be impossible.⁶⁴

⁶² Cf. A 799-800 / B 827-828. In the first section of the *Canon*, whose title is *On the Ultimate End of the Pure Use of our Reason*, Kant claims that these three traditional objects of metaphysical disputes (God, freedom of the will, immortality of the soul) are not of major importance from a theoretical point of view: as Gabriele Gava argues, "this is because even if we were able to establish freedom, immortality and the existence of God, this would not contribute in any way to our understanding of nature, since we would have no way of grasping how a free will, an immortal soul or God could relate to the sensible world of our experience" (Gava, 2023, p. 54); in short, these three elements would be of no use in providing explanations of phenomena we encounter within experience. Rather, reason must find in them a purely practical interest (cf. A 800 / B 828). In more detail, as Kant shows in the next section (*On the Ideal of the Highest Good, as a Determining Ground of the Ultimate End of Pure Reason*), it is possible to identify practical grounds on the basis of which to establish the existence of God and the immortality of the soul: these consist in the necessity to postulate the realizability of the highest good, which is possible only if we assume God's existence together with a future life (cf. A 811 / B 839). It is, therefore, the ideal of the highest good that provides us with valid practical reasons for assuming the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. As Kant clarifies at the very end of the previous section, the freedom of the will is not at stake in this context since it "concerns merely speculative knowledge" and the canon of pure reason is concerned only with "reason in its practical use" (A 803-804 / B 831-832).

⁶³ Cf. de Boer, 2020, pp. 45, 256-257. In more detail, Karin de Boer argues that Kant's target in his critique of former metaphysics is precisely its tendency to "objectify its various conceptions of the unconditioned", since "without doubt, Kant considered the problems afflicting former special metaphysics to be rooted" in this trend. More precisely, because the pure understanding is responsible for this objectifying activity towards the contents of metaphysics, Kant's solution, in de Boer's interpretation, lies in "disentangling pure reason from the pure understanding", assigning each of them their own domain; in this aspect, the author sees a fundamental continuity with the program of Kant's *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770 (de Boer, 2020, pp. 256-257).

⁶⁴ B xxix-xxx.

Therefore: “metaphysics has as the proper end of its investigation only three ideas: *God, freedom, and immortality*”⁶⁵; but if metaphysics claims to grasp these unconditioned objects in the progress of a possible experience, then either it falls into enthusiasm and superstition or it sinks into skepticism and idealism⁶⁶. In more detail, the objectifying tendency of former metaphysics consisted in “transforming into an appearance” what, by its very definition, cannot be an appearance, and therefore cannot belong to the domain of a possible experience for us. Both claiming *dogmatically* to obtain knowledge of the objects of *metaphysica specialis*, and *skeptically* doubting the possibility for reason to somehow reach beyond the limits of the sensible world, lead to one and the same consequence: that of undermining morality and religion, and, in doing so, man’s moral destination as a whole. It is the task of criticism, therefore, to rectify this trend of former metaphysics and “to deprive dialectic once and for all of all disadvantageous influence, by blocking off the source of the errors”⁶⁷, with the priceless benefit of putting “an end for all future time to objections against morality and religion”⁶⁸.

Kant is even more explicit in listing the obstacles that a non-critical metaphysics poses to man’s moral destination, and therefore the true enemies of criticism:

Through criticism alone can we sever the very root of *materialism* [*Materialism*], *fatalism* [*Fatalism*], *atheism* [*Atheism*], of freethinking *unbelief* [*Unglauben*], of *enthusiasm* [*Schwärmerei*] and *superstition* [*Aberglauben*], which can become generally injurious, and finally also of *idealism* [*Idealism*] and *skepticism* [*Skeptizism*], which are more dangerous to the schools and can hardly be transmitted to the public.⁶⁹

Securing man’s moral destination is thus the true aim Kant is striving for in recognizing the need for a critical turn in his philosophy, as a solution to the problem of amending metaphysics. The goal of keeping the three objects of *metaphysica specialis* from the conceptual grasp of theoretical reason, in fact, is dependent on an even higher intention, as we read in the *Canon*:

⁶⁵ B 395. Coherently, Kant confirms in the *Canon of Pure Reason* that “the entire armament of reason, in the undertaking that one can call pure philosophy, is in fact directed only at the three problems that have been mentioned” (A 800 / B 828).

⁶⁶ Cf. B xxxiv.

⁶⁷ B xxxi.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ B xxxiv.

These themselves [God, freedom, immortality of the soul], however, have in turn their more remote aim, namely, *what is to be done* [*was zu tun sei*] if the will is free, if there is a God, and if there is a future world. Now since these concern our conduct in relation to the highest end [*auf den höchsten Zweck*], the ultimate aim of nature which provides for us very wisely in the disposition of reason is properly directed only to what is moral [*Moralische*].⁷⁰

As Kant points out, “with regard to all three [God, freedom, immortality of the soul] the merely speculative interest of reason is very small”⁷¹; therefore, since they still are “insistently recommended to us by our reason, their importance must really concern only the practical [*das Praktische*]”⁷². Not contemplating Kant a second phase of his critical enterprise (the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*) by the time of the first publication of the *KrV*, in fact, the *Canon* had precisely the task to deal with the “*practical use of reason*”⁷³. It is, ultimately, the practical interest of reason that necessarily drives it beyond the realm of possible experience: thanks to the critique, reason can now follow that path legitimately, i.e., through its practical use. This way, reason can attain its own supreme ends, namely those of morality. Therefore, “the transcendental improvement [*transzendente Steigerung*] of our rational cognition” is “the effect of the practical purposiveness which pure reason imposes on us”⁷⁴. The destination (*Bestimmung*) of man, imposed to him by the nature of his own reason, is in fact his self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*) through reason itself, emancipating himself from nature, namely from the causality of nature to which we are subject in the sensible world⁷⁵. Reason, in its practical extension “beyond the boundaries of sensibility”, does not need “any assistance from speculative reason”, but still it must “be made secure against any counteraction from the latter, in order not to fall into contradiction with itself”⁷⁶.

⁷⁰ A 800-801 / B 828-829.

⁷¹ A 798 / B 826. See note 62.

⁷² A 799-800 / B 827-828. See note 62.

⁷³ A 797 / B 825.

⁷⁴ A 817 / B 845.

⁷⁵ Cf. Brandt, 2007, p. 13. According to Reinhard Brandt, “the moral determination of the individual human being and of humanity as a whole is the directing center of Kant’s philosophy”. Accordingly, Kant’s criticism towards “the alleged theoretical knowledge of God, freedom and immortality” is motivated by the fundamental attempt to assign to these objects their most proper domain, i.e., that of practical reason, as “objects of our faith, action and hope” now freed “from the grasp of theoretical knowledge”, i.e., from a kind of knowledge that only suits the phenomenal world, governed by mechanical causality (ivi, pp. 7-12, my translation).

⁷⁶ B xxv.

It is possible to grasp, therefore, the importance of the transcendental distinction, introduced by criticism: the very possibility to safeguard what may be beyond the realm of a possible experience for us lies in the awareness that a distinction must be made between the domain of appearances and that of things as they are in themselves; and this very possibility is offered by the acknowledgment and acceptance of the limitation of human knowledge, as a result of the entire transcendental framework proposed by Kant. Indeed:

Now if we find that on the assumption that our cognition from experience conforms to the objects as things in themselves, the unconditioned cannot be thought at all without contradiction, but that on the contrary, if we assume that our representation of things as they are given to us does not conform to these things as they are in themselves but rather that these objects as appearances conform to our way of representing, then the contradiction disappears; and consequently that the unconditioned must not be present in things insofar as we are acquainted with them (insofar as they are given to us) but rather in things insofar as we are not acquainted with them, as things in themselves: then this would show that what we initially assumed only as an experiment is well grounded.⁷⁷

If we try to think the unconditioned (as reason unavoidably prescribes us) under the presupposition that our cognition “conforms to the objects as things in themselves”, a contradiction arises: if we conceive of the objects of our experience as things in themselves, then we expect to find the unconditioned in the progress of that very same experience, which is rather inconsistent with the very notion of the unconditioned. If, instead, we attempt the opposite path, assuming that our cognition of things “does not conform to these things as they are in themselves”, then the contradiction fades away: the unconditioned is not expected to be met in the progress of our experience (which would be absurd), but rather must be present “in things insofar as we are not acquainted with them, as things in themselves”. As Kant concludes, the validity of the transcendental distinction, initially only assumed “as an experiment”⁷⁸, is indirectly proved by the disappearance of the contradiction. It will therefore be possible to *think* the unconditioned (even though not to *know* it) and to approach it via an alternative path to the speculative one, i.e., the one travelled by reason in its practical use. If theoretical reason, through the critique and its transcendental idealism, prepares the ground for a practical extension into

⁷⁷ B xx-xxi.

⁷⁸ For this and previous quotations: *ibid.*

the domain of the unconditioned, then it is prevented by mistakes and errors stemming from the misunderstanding of appearances as things in themselves.

This line of argument applies both to God, freedom and the soul, each of them being the idea of an unconditioned: with respect to them, it is possible to see the positive outcome of this service rendered by reason in its critical use. In the solution of the *Antinomies*, indeed, Kant writes:

One easily sees, however, that since everything in the sum total of appearances is alterable, hence conditioned in its existence, there could not be any unconditioned member anywhere in the series of dependent existences whose existence would be absolutely necessary; and hence that if appearances were things in themselves, and so just for this reason their condition always belong to one and the same series of intuitions, then a necessary being could never occur as a condition of the existence of appearances in the world of sense.⁷⁹

With even more insightful words,

the necessary being would have to be thought of as entirely outside the series of the world of sense (as an *ens extramundanum*) and merely intelligible; this is the only way of preventing it from being subjected to the law of the contingency and dependence of all appearances.⁸⁰

The same applies to freedom:

For if appearances are things in themselves, then freedom cannot be saved. Then nature is the completely determining cause, sufficient in itself, of every occurrence, and the condition for an occurrence is always contained only in the series of appearances that, along with their effect, are necessary under the law of nature. If, on the other hand, appearance do not count for any more than they are in fact, namely, not for things in themselves but only for mere representations [...] then they themselves must have grounds that are not appearances.⁸¹

Kant's beautiful words about the advantage that the critical task towards rational psychology brings about for morality and man's destination may conclude this very first section of this research:

⁷⁹ A 559-560 / B 587-588.

⁸⁰ A 561 / B 589.

⁸¹ A 536-537 / B 564-565.

Thus there is no rational psychology as doctrine that might provide us with an addition to our self-confidence, but only as discipline, setting impassable boundaries for speculative reason in this field, in order, on the one side, not to be thrown into the lap of a soulless materialism, or on the other side not to get lost wandering about in a spiritualism that must be groundless for us in life; on the contrary, it rather reminds us to regard this refusal of our reason to give an answer to those curious questions, which reach beyond this life, as reason's hint that we should turn our self-knowledge away from fruitless and extravagant speculation toward fruitful practical uses, which, even if it is always directed only to objects of experience, takes its principles from somewhere higher, and so determines our behavior, as if our vocation extended infinitely far above experience, and hence above this life.⁸²

1.1.2 The Critical Path

In the previous section, an attempt was made to frame the problems that afflicted former metaphysics in such a way that Kant, during the development of his thought, gradually identified and targeted its weaknesses so that a reform of this science could be advanced. Furthermore, the most significant concerns that moved him to pursue this purpose were highlighted. The task is now to travel the path that he travelled in endowing himself with the theoretical and conceptual framework to be able to achieve this goal, which was only fully accomplished with the publication of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Through this brief exploration, it will be possible to highlight the genesis of the building material that, over decades of construction, eventually shaped the critical framework. With this in mind, attention will be paid to those stages in Kant's pre-critical writings that represent fundamental steps on the way of the most important insights within his long-term effort towards the "secure path of a science" for metaphysics⁸³. For the purposes of this work, it will be sufficient to limit the consideration to only those aspects that are deemed to be most significant in view of a comparison with the later *KrV*, without the possibility of delving into a more specific examination of these works and their context. More specific attention will be dedicated to the *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770 and to the letter Kant sent to Markus Herz in February 1772, these works documenting the very last and fundamental stages of the path towards the critical turn in his thought: for this reason, a comparison between their conceptual framework and the critical system of the

⁸² B 421.

⁸³ For the sake of this brief reconstruction, I mainly adopted the guideline of the very punctual examinations found in Pollok, 2017, pp. 44-57, and de Boer, 2020, pp. 44-65.

Transcendental Aesthetic, as first displayed in 1781, will be attempted, in order to clarify both similarities and differences, the latter manifesting a still ongoing evolution towards the critical system.

As Konstantin Pollok's analysis points out, "any determination of the starting point of Kant's critical turn in terms of an actual date can be gainsaid, simply because the process was not linear"⁸⁴. It can be said that his increasingly critical confrontation with rationalist metaphysics has matured about thirty years before hiring the instruments of the critical system: through this time, starting from a rationalist paradigm⁸⁵, Kant gradually emancipated himself from many of its crucial assumptions. At the same time, this process did not only take the shape of a critique to traditional metaphysics, but also that of self-criticism⁸⁶, which acts as a driving force along his intellectual trajectory: it is possible to see his constant effort in amending and revisiting his position in order to endow himself with better and more powerful conceptual resources.

According to Kant's retracement of his own conceptual path in a later note, at a very early stage his striving for improving metaphysics was directed towards "the aim of thereby acquiring dogmatic insights"⁸⁷. In his *Principiorum primorum cognitionis metaphysicae nova dilucidatio* of 1755, his aim is to "throw some light [...] on the first principles of our cognition"⁸⁸: as it can be grasped by the grounding role of the comparison between God's perfect intuitive knowledge and the efforts of man striving to reach that perfection, his standpoint is still very close to the Leibniz-Wolffian metaphysics⁸⁹. His method consists firstly in critically scrutinizing "the supreme and

⁸⁴ Pollok, 2017, p. 45.

⁸⁵ According to Pollok, one of the crucial aspects of the rationalist paradigm within which the young Kant was operating lies in its perfectionism: according to the latter, "God is the archetype of perfection while finite beings can only strive to approximate this perfection by rationally analyzing their obscure image of the world." (ibid.). The accomplishment of the critical turn will be reached only through his "farewell to 'perfection'", i.e., his gradual abandonment of "the doctrine that the human mind should try to conform as much as possible to an infinite intellect" (ivi, p. 56).

⁸⁶ Cf. de Boer, 2020, p. 45.

⁸⁷ AA 18:95. This note, R5116, is dated between 1776 and 1778.

⁸⁸ AA 01:387.

⁸⁹ Kant writes: "For to mention just one point: since all our reasoning amounts to uncovering the identity between the predicate and the subject, either in itself or in relation to other things, as is apparent from the ultimate rule of truths, it can be seen that God has no need of reasoning, for, since all things are exposed in the clearest possible way to his gaze, it is the same act of representation which presents to his understanding the things which are in agreement and those which are not. Nor does God need the analysis which is made necessary for us by the night which darkens our intelligence." (AA 01:391).

undoubted primacy of the principle of contradiction over all truths”, and secondly in establishing “two new principles of metaphysical cognition”⁹⁰.

In his *Versuch den Begriff der negativen Größen in die Weltweisheit einzuführen* of 1763, Kant introduces an aspect that will later be crucial in his attainment of the critical turn, i.e., the difference between “logical opposition” and “real opposition”: the first “consists in the fact that something is simultaneously affirmed and denied of the very same thing. The consequence of the logical contradiction is *nothing at all* [...], as the law of contradiction asserts”.

The second opposition, namely real [*reale*] opposition, is that where two predicates of a thing are opposed to each other, but not through the law of contradiction. Here, too, one thing cancels that which is posited by the other; but the consequence is *something (cogitabile)*. The motive force of a body in one direction and an equal tendency of the same body in the opposite direction do not contradict each other; as predicates, they are simultaneously possible in one body. The consequence of such an opposition is rest, which is something [*etwas*] (*repraesentabile*). It is, nonetheless, a true opposition [*eine wahre Entgegensetzung*].⁹¹

In a nutshell, real opposition essentially differs from logical opposition because it is founded on “real grounds” (*Realgründe*). This insight is pivotal for the subsequent evolution towards the *KrV*: the material that can supply “real causes” to explain this type of opposition can only come from experience (or, in a later terminology, *a posteriori*), and cannot be derived through merely logical analysis. This is perfectly consistent with Kant’s later claim in the *KrV* that: “I can *think* whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself” (as long as my thought is not afflicted by a logical opposition); but “to *cognize* an object, it is required that I be able to prove its possibility”, since “in order to ascribe objective validity to such a concept (real possibility, for the first sort of possibility was merely logical) something more is required”⁹². This aspect is crucial for the sake of our analysis because, following Andrew Chignell’s insightful reading of the development

⁹⁰ AA 01:387. These principles are the following: the “principle of succession”, according to which “no change can happen to substances except in so far as they are connected with other substances; their reciprocal dependency on each other determines their reciprocal changes of state”; and the “principle of co-existence”, establishing that “finite substances do not, in virtue of their existence, stand in a relationship with each other, nor are they linked together by any interaction at all, except in so far as the common principle of their existence, namely the divine understanding, maintains them in a state of harmony in their reciprocal relations” (AA 01:410-413).

⁹¹ For this and previous quotations: AA 02:171.

⁹² For this and previous quotations: B xxvi.

of the critical path, it seems that the reason why the later Kant “prohibits us from having synthetic *knowledge* of supersensible ‘things-in-themselves’” might lie in a “new theory of modality, a view that developed out of reflection on the rationalist tradition in which he was trained”: in short, “propositions about things-in-themselves” cannot meet the condition that, if one is to know a proposition, one must “be able to prove that all the items it refers to are either really possible or really impossible”⁹³.

In a letter to Moses Mendelssohn from April 1766, hints can be seen towards the specific kind of investigation that will later be peculiar to the critical enquiry: “Here we must decide whether there really are not boundaries imposed upon us by the limitations of our reason, or rather, the limitations of experience that contains the *data* for our reason”⁹⁴.

In these years, Kant’s progressive departure from the rationalist paradigm suddenly speeds up as soon as he has a decisive insight: as he recalls in a much later letter to Christian Garve, that it was “the antinomy of pure reason [...] what first aroused” him from his “dogmatic slumber” and drove him “to the critique of reason itself, in order to

⁹³ Chignell, 2014, pp. 573-574. More specifically, Chignell’s interesting proposal consists in interpreting the critical Kant’s prohibition of noumenal cognition as the outcome of a coherentist constraint on knowledge. To show that something is really possible, it is not much necessary to prove its empirical actuality, i.e., to effectively show it in intuition (as empiricism contends); not even proving its empirical possibility, i.e., its possibility in the progress of possible experience, is a determining condition (it is, however, if one restricts the consideration to phenomena). Rather, the real possibility of an object is proved when its possible existence “*positively coheres*” with a subject’s “background knowledge of nature and its laws” (ivi, p. 593). Kant’s restriction of cognition to the domain of a possible experience should therefore be interpreted as the consequence of a new and more complex account of knowledge by Kant, one that succeeds “in ruling *out* synthetic *a priori* knowledge of specific properties of noumena” (since Kant charges dogmatic metaphysics of “claiming to have more synthetic *a priori* knowledge than they actually do”); but at the same time, one that can account for at least “some knowledge of things-in-themselves: analytic knowledge, negative knowledge” (for example, knowledge that “*the things-in-themselves are not in space and time*”) and “some very general positive knowledge” (for example, knowledge that “*there are some things that ground appearances*”, as we read in B xxvi). It is noteworthy that the objects of these types of knowledge “are indeed things-in-themselves, but taken collectively”: therefore, “we have proof of the actuality and thus the real possibility of the *Dinge an sich* taken *together*, though not of any particular determinate *Ding*” (ivi, pp. 573-597).

⁹⁴ AA 10:72. In this letter, Kant’s twofold judgement on metaphysics is made explicit: “I am far from regarding metaphysics itself, objectively considered, to be trivial or dispensable; in fact I have been convinced for some time now that I understand its nature and its proper place among the disciplines of human knowledge and that the true and lasting welfare of the human race depends on metaphysics”; but at the same time, in relation to current metaphysics, he contends: “I cannot conceal my repugnance, and even a certain hatred, toward the inflated arrogance of whole volumes full of that are passed off nowadays as insights; for I am fully convinced that the path that has been selected is completely wrong, that the methods now in vogue must infinitely increase the amount of folly and error in the world, and that even the total extermination of all these chimerical insights would be less harmful than the dream science itself, with its confounded contagion” (AA 10:70).

resolve the scandal of ostensible contradiction of reason with itself⁹⁵. It was, then, in order to reconcile this unacceptable conflict of reason that he brought out all his theoretical equipment necessary for a critique of dogmatic metaphysics.

The year 1769 gave Kant “a great light”⁹⁶ about the long-awaited solution, so that the next year he was able to present some of his insight in the *Inaugural Dissertation*. In a letter that Kant sent to Johann Heinrich Lambert together with the *Dissertation* in September 1770, he is confident that “for perhaps a year now”, he has “arrived at a position” that he “shall never have to change”; “a position from which all sorts of metaphysical questions can be examined according to wholly certain and easy criteria”⁹⁷. As Karin de Boer suggests, the “great light” Kant mentions was probably made possible by a first, decisive shift of focus from the attempt to obtain certain knowledge about the objects of cognition to the critical enquiry into the subject’s mode of cognition, trying to determine “the nature and boundaries”⁹⁸ of *a priori* cognition of objects⁹⁹. Anticipating what would have been the content of the *KrV*, he claims in the letter to Lambert that “the principles of sensibility, their validity and their limitations” must be “determined, so that these principles could not be confusedly applied to objects of pure reason, as has heretofore almost always happened”; the latter condition, in fact, is precisely the cause of “extremely mistaken conclusions”¹⁰⁰. Coherently, the “great light” might have been the insight that metaphysics, in order to resolve its everlasting conflicts, should make use only of purely intellectual concepts, i.e., concepts stemming from the intellect alone (in its real use); therefore, it should in the very first place rid itself of all concepts and judgments that are affected by sensibility¹⁰¹.

⁹⁵ AA 12:257-258. This letter to Christian Garve is dated September 21, 1798. As Karin de Boer points out, this reconstruction does not contrast with Kant’s well-known different account in the *Prolegomena*: “I freely admit that the remembrance of *David Hume* was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy.” (AA 04:260). According to her view, in fact, it was right after identifying the conflicts that metaphysics produces that Kant was finally ready to confront “Hume’s denial of the capacity of the human mind to obtain cognitions of objects independently of experience” (de Boer, 2020, p. 49).

⁹⁶ AA 18:69. In this note, dated between 1776 and 1778, Kant confirms his long-lasting meditation: “I tried quite earnestly to prove propositions and their opposite, not in order to establish a skeptical doctrine, but rather because I suspected I could discover in what an illusion of the understanding was hiding”.

⁹⁷ AA 10:97.

⁹⁸ AA 18:95.

⁹⁹ Cf. de Boer, 2020, pp. 48-50.

¹⁰⁰ AA 10:98.

¹⁰¹ Cf. de Boer, 2020, pp. 57-58.

1.1.2.1 *Inaugural Dissertation*

Kant's *Inaugural Dissertation* (*De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis*) was occasioned by his promotion in 1770 to the professorship of logic and metaphysics in Königsberg, for which the defense of a dissertation in Latin was requested: for this reason, as Henry Allison advises, it should be seen as witnessing a phase in which the development of Kant's thought was still "in considerable flux", rather than as the expression of a definitively accomplished position¹⁰². It is possible, however, to observe how Kant's departure from the rationalist paradigm becomes even greater than in the previous works, marking important steps in the direction of the critical turn, which will be fully performed only eleven years later. Assuming the standpoint of the *KrV*, therefore, both elements of continuity and points of fracture can be highlighted. The exposition will therefore be organized in such a way as to firstly address the aspects of agreement with the *KrV*, and secondly to emphasize the elements of distance between the two, signaling a still unfolding elaboration of the critical framework.

The *Dissertation* is organized in five sections: the first deals with the concept of a world in general, the second introduces the distinction between sensible and intelligible things, the third lays out the principles of the form of the sensible world (space and time), the fourth discusses the principle of the form of the intelligible world and the fifth discusses method in metaphysics.

Pivotal to the work is the critical insight that the very first rule of method in metaphysics should consist in discarding any content originating from sensibility. In §24 Kant writes:

Every method employed by metaphysics, in dealing with what is sensitive and what belongs to the understanding, amounts, in particular, to this prescription: great care must be taken *lest the principles which are native to sensitive cognition transgress their limits, and affect what belongs to the understanding*.¹⁰³

This novel criterion, brought about by the aforementioned "great light" recalled by Kant in a private note, seems to be the fulcrum on which Kant sets his solution to the problem of metaphysics, and thus also his critique of rationalist metaphysics, guilty of

¹⁰² Allison, 2015, p. 43.

¹⁰³ AA 02:411.

producing and employing concepts that surreptitiously rely on sensibility, giving rise to conflicts and contradictions that could easily be avoided simply by following the prescription cited above.

As the second section of the *Dissertation* makes clear, the very possibility of disentangling purely intellectual concepts and concepts relying on sensibility lies in a preliminary precise “distinction between sensible things and intelligible things in general”¹⁰⁴, also involving a reconfiguration of the conception of the faculties of sensibility and intelligence, as compared to the rationalist paradigm.

Sensibility is the *receptivity* of a subject in virtue of which it is possible for the subject’s own representative state to be affected in a definite way by the presence of some object. *Intelligence* (rationality) is the *faculty* of a subject in virtue of which it has the power to represent things which cannot by their own quality come before the senses of that subject.¹⁰⁵

After sharply distinguishing these two faculties, challenging the rationalist monism¹⁰⁶, it is also possible to discern with precision what stems from each of them: “the object of sensitivity is the sensible; that which contains nothing but what is to be cognized through the intelligence is intelligible”. Kant also invokes the “ancients” to clarify these two concepts through the notions of *phenomenon* and *noumenon*. Furthermore, he coherently separates two kinds of cognition: “in so far as it is subject to the laws of sensibility”, it is “*sensitive*”, while “in so far as it is subject to the laws of intelligence, it is *intellectual* or rational”¹⁰⁷. Another important clarification is that “things which are thought sensitively are representations of things *as they appear*; while things which are intellectual are representations of things *as they are*”, since “whatever in cognition is sensitive is dependent upon the special character of the subject in so far as the subject is capable of this or that modification by the presence of objects”, but

¹⁰⁴ AA 02:392.

¹⁰⁵ AA 02:393.

¹⁰⁶ According to the rationalist paradigm, there is continuity between sensible and rational cognition, and the difference between the two only lies in the “confused” nature of the former and the “clarity” and “distinctness” of the latter; therefore, within this framework “representations, concepts, and ideas are identical” (Pollok, 2017, p. 49). Furthermore, in §7 Kant charges “the illustrious Wolff” of having, by considering the “distinction between what is sensitive and what belongs to the understanding” as merely logical, “completely abolished, to the great detriment of philosophy, the noblest of the enterprises of antiquity, the discussion of the *character of phenomena and noumena*”, and of having “turned men’s minds away from that enquiry to things which are often only logical minutiae” (AA 02:395).

¹⁰⁷ For this and the previous quotations: AA 02:392.

“whatever cognition is exempt from such subjective conditions relates only to the object¹⁰⁸. This very sharp separation between sensible and intellectual cognition is the fundamental means by which Kant settles his critique of former metaphysics: it is only by being aware of which concepts derive from which faculty, that metaphysics can finally divest itself of the “thick” concepts stemming from sensibility and employ only purely intellectual “thin”¹⁰⁹ concepts, as prescribed by the touchstone discerned by Kant.

A result of the difference thus established between how things appear and how things are is Kant’s remark, echoing his future critique to transcendental realism, about the mistake of “taking the limits, by which the human mind is circumscribed, for the limits within which the very essence of things is contained”:

For whatever *conflicts with* the laws of the understanding and the laws of reason is undoubtedly impossible. But that which, being an object of pure reason, simply *does not come under* the laws of intuitive cognition, is not in the same position. For this lack of accord between the *sensitive* faculty and the faculty of the *understanding* [...] points only to the fact that *the abstract ideas which the mind entertains when they have been received from the understanding very often cannot be followed up in the concrete and converted into intuitions*. But this *subjective* resistance often creates the false impression of an *objective* resistance.¹¹⁰

Kant is here singling out two different but concentric domains: on the one hand, that of logical possibility, whose boundaries are determined by the law of contradiction; on the other hand, that of real possibility, whose borders are constrained by the limits of our sensible cognition. Returning to the notions of “logical opposition” and “real opposition”, we can say that the domain of logical possibility is the broader space in which everything that is not rendered impossible by logical opposition is located, while the domain of real possibility is the narrower region in which that which, by its own nature, can “come under the laws of intuitive cognition”¹¹¹ is located. The importance of this insight will be crucial for Kant’s transcendental idealism: the limits of our (sensible) cognition, i.e., the boundaries of phenomena, are not the limits of things as they are in

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ I borrow this efficacious expression from de Boer, 2020, pp. 57-58. “Thin” concepts are those whose origin is purely intellectual, i.e., that are derived only from the intellect through its real use (e.g. composition); “thick” concepts, instead, are those that presuppose sensibility, i.e., rest “upon the conditions of time”, e.g., that of a “compound” (AA 02:387).

¹¹⁰ For this and the previous quotation: AA 02:389.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

themselves. In other words, “the very essence of things” is not necessarily restricted within the boundaries of an experience possible for us. This argument is paving the way for Kant’s later acknowledgement of a room of possibility for what can be *thought*, even if not *known*¹¹².

Great importance also has to be attributed to the new emphasis on the normativity of cognition: Kant recognizes both to sensible and to intellectual cognition the presence of respective laws guiding the cognizing subject; in fact, they can be considered as two distinguished faculties precisely because each has its own normativity and its principle of order. Most significantly, by acknowledging laws inherent to sensibility, capable of guiding us towards correct cognition, Kant stands in defence of sensible cognition from the typically rationalist tendency to dismiss it as confused and illusory¹¹³:

From this one can see that the sensitive is poorly defined as that which is *more* confusedly cognised, and that which belongs to the understanding as that of which there is a *distinct* cognition. For these are only logical distinctions which *do not touch* at all the things *given*, which underlie every logical comparison. Thus, sensitive representations can be very distinct and representations which belong to the understanding can be extremely confused.¹¹⁴

Through this argument, Kant is also setting the grounds for securing the reality of knowledge deriving from sensibility against the idealist suspect. This move will be fully carried out in the *KrV*, when Kant will defend empirical realism, i.e., the empirical reality of all appearances, along with their transcendental ideality¹¹⁵.

In *Section 3* of the *Dissertation* Kant introduces and discusses the formal principles of the sensible world, namely space and time, presenting them as “the two principles of sensitive cognition”¹¹⁶, “the schemata and conditions of everything sensitive

¹¹² As Kant claims in §22 of the transcendental deduction, “To think of an object and to cognize an object are thus not the same” (B 146). See also B166. This remark by Kant should not be interpreted, however, as perfectly overlapping with his later view in the *KrV*. As I will show in the following pages, a significant difference between the latter and the *Inaugural Dissertation* is that in 1770 Kant is still committed to the possibility of noumenal cognition. Furthermore, the so-called “discursivity thesis”, prescribing the necessary cooperation of sensibility and understanding in order to obtain cognition, is still absent, since the accent here is on the autonomy of the two faculties, rather than on their interaction (cf. Pollok, 2017, p. 50). I will return on the difference between the domain of cognition and that of thought in Section 1.2.4.1.

¹¹³ Cf. Beiser, 2002, p. 37.

¹¹⁴ AA 02:394.

¹¹⁵ I will consider in more detail the topic of Kant’s empirical realism in Section 1.2.2.

¹¹⁶ AA 02:405.

in human cognition”¹¹⁷: through them we are able to conceive of the phenomenal world. Similarly as in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, space and time are claimed to be not general concepts, but “singular intuitions, which are nonetheless pure”¹¹⁸. In 1781 Kant will argue that “space is not a discursive or [...] general concept of relations of things in general, but a pure intuition”¹¹⁹ and that “time is no discursive or [...] general concept, but a pure form of sensible intuition”¹²⁰. In the *Inaugural Dissertation*, “the idea of time does not arise from but is presupposed by the senses”¹²¹ and “the concept of space is not abstracted from outer sensations”¹²²; likewise, in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* “time is not an empirical concept that is somehow drawn from an experience”¹²³ and “space is not an empirical concept that has been drawn from outer experiences”¹²⁴. Importantly, Kant writes in 1770 that “time is not something objective and real”, but rather “the subjective condition which is necessary, in virtue of the nature of the human mind, for the coordinating of all sensible things in accordance with a fixed law”¹²⁵; and neither space is “something objective and real”, but “rather, subjective and ideal”, since it “issues from the nature of the mind in accordance with a stable law as a scheme, [...] for co-ordinating everything which is sensed externally”¹²⁶. In 1781 these considerations took the form of Kant’s defense of the empirical reality and, at the same time, transcendental ideality of space and time; about space, he claims:

Our expositions accordingly teach the *reality* (i.e., objective validity) of space in regard to everything that can come before us externally as an object, but at the same time the *ideality* of space in regard to things when they are considered in themselves through reason, i.e., without taking account of the constitution of our sensibility. We therefore assert the *empirical reality* of space (with respect to all possible outer experience), though to be sure at the same time its *transcendental ideality*, i.e., that it is nothing as soon as we leave out the condition of the possibility of all experience, and take it as something that grounds the things in themselves.¹²⁷

¹¹⁷ AA 02:398.

¹¹⁸ AA 02:405.

¹¹⁹ A 24-25 / B 39.

¹²⁰ A 31-32 / B 47.

¹²¹ AA 02:398.

¹²² AA 02:402.

¹²³ A 30 / B 46.

¹²⁴ A 23 / B 38.

¹²⁵ AA 02:400.

¹²⁶ AA 02:403.

¹²⁷ A 27-28 / B 44.

In the subsequent pages, he draws the same conclusions from the exposition of time¹²⁸.

In highlighting the most significant elements of agreement between the 1770 *Dissertation* and the *KrV*, however, great care must be taken not to underestimate the importance of the divergences between the two works: these show that the development of Kant's critical conceptual framework was not yet completed in 1770, indeed it took him another eleven years before he finally fully performed his critical turn.

A first, pivotal discrepancy lies in the fact that, at this point in his production, Kant still believes in the cognizability of things as they are in themselves, through the means of purely intellectual concepts. His position on this point has evidently changed by the time he published the *KrV*, since in §8 of the *Transcendental Aesthetic* he clearly states: "What may be the case with objects in themselves and abstracted from all this receptivity of our sensibility remains entirely unknown to us"¹²⁹. In other words, "what the objects may be in themselves would still never be known through the most enlightened cognition of their appearance, which alone is given to us"¹³⁰. According to Karin de Boer, however, on this aspect the *Inaugural Dissertation* is "less dogmatic than seems to be the case"¹³¹, since Kant only speaks of "symbolic cognition", writing: "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"¹³². In any case, however, the crucial aspect of an explicit acknowledgement of the epistemic limitation of human cognition to the domain of empirical reality is still lacking: the intellect is still thought, somehow, to be able to represent things as they really are through its real use¹³³, while this possibility is clearly denied in the *KrV*.

¹²⁸ A 35-36 / B 52.

¹²⁹ A 42 / B 59.

¹³⁰ A 43 / B 60. See also the already-mentioned passage in B xxvi, where Kant states that "we can have cognition of no object as a thing in itself, but only insofar as it is an object of sensible intuition, i.e. as an appearance".

¹³¹ De Boer, 2020, p. 62.

¹³² AA 02: 396.

¹³³ The real use of the understanding is that through which "the fundamental concepts of things and of relations, and the axioms themselves, are given in a fundamental fashion by the pure understanding itself"; this is the use of the intellect that is employed "in pure philosophy, such as metaphysics". Through the logical use of the understanding, instead, "we simply subordinate cognitions to one another, according to their universality and in conformity with the principle of contradiction, and by which we subordinate phenomena to more general phenomena, and the corollaries of pure intuition to intuitive axioms" (AA 2:411).

This feature is rooted in a more fundamental motivation: as Konstantin Pollok's interpretation makes clear, in 1770 Kant is still, at least partially, committed to a form of normative perfectionism, according to which the divine intellect represents the ideal of perfect cognition of things as they are in themselves¹³⁴. Even though perfectionism does not rule anymore sensible cognition (after Kant's departure from the rationalist monism¹³⁵), nonetheless it plays a role in intelligible cognition:

This paradigm is *noumenal perfection*. This, however, is perfection either in the theoretical sense or in the practical sense. In the former sense, it is the Supreme Being, *God*; in the latter sense, it is *moral perfection*. [...] But, although God, as the ideal of perfection, is the principle of cognizing, He is also, at the same time, in so far as He really exists, the principle of the coming into being of all perfection whatsoever.¹³⁶

It is therefore clear that Kant is still here committed to a view according to which, as it was in early-modern rationalism, “the *ens realissimum*, embodying the highest degree of reality, or perfection, must be seen as the archetype of being and cognition”¹³⁷. In the words of Henry Allison, the paradigm of cognition is here still theocentric: objects are seen as necessarily conforming to their conception in the divine intellect, therefore human cognizers can only strive to reach the ideal of perfect cognition represented by God as the Supreme Being. “The idea of such an intellect”, Allison explains, “functions as an implicit norm in the light of which human cognition is analyzed and measured”¹³⁸. The underlying presupposition of this paradigm is that of transcendental realism, i.e., that the objects of the world are given to the cognizing mind as they are in themselves: if the ideal of cognition is that of a divine intellect cognizing things as they are in themselves, human cognition, aspiring to that ideal, cannot but assume things as they are in themselves as their proper objects¹³⁹. The fulfilment of the transcendental turn will therefore consist in the definitive shift to an anthropocentric model of knowledge, reached only in the *KrV* together with the novel standpoint of transcendental idealism. Along with this acquisition, another important one will be made: the shift from an intuitive conception of knowledge

¹³⁴ Cf. Pollok, 2017, p. 51.

¹³⁵ See note 106.

¹³⁶ AA 02:396.

¹³⁷ Pollok, 2017, p. 52.

¹³⁸ Allison, 2004, p. 28.

¹³⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

(according to which an immediate apprehension of the objects of the world is possible), embraced by former rationalism and empiricism, to a discursive conception of knowledge, according to which human knowledge can take place only through the cooperation of sensibility and understanding¹⁴⁰. In the years around 1770, however, Kant was still striving for a definitive and satisfactory position, being open to the emergence of new questions and issues.

1.1.2.2 Letter to Herz (1772)

In the reconstruction of the path that led Kant to the full achievement of his critical position, a well-known letter Kant wrote to Markus Herz on the 21st of February 1772 plays a crucial role; many scholars refer to it as containing the testimony of the birth of the *KrV*. This letter is, in fact, a precious document of the new perplexities and problems that Kant had identified in the theory he set out only two years earlier in the *Inaugural Dissertation*, showing that this theory was still far from being considered by him as definitive.

In this letter Kant announces he was “making plans for a work that might perhaps have the title, *The Limits of Sensibility and Reason*”¹⁴¹; however,

As I thought through the theoretical part, considering its whole scope and the reciprocal relations of all its parts, I noticed that I still lacked something essential, something that in my long metaphysical studies I, as well as others, had failed to consider and which in fact constitutes the key to the whole secret of metaphysics, hitherto still hidden from itself. I asked myself this question: What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call “representation” to the object?¹⁴²

Recalling the path he had followed in the 1770 *Dissertation*, he states:

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 brought about by the objects.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *ivi*, p. xiv. According to the discursivity thesis, human cognition “requires both concepts and *sensible* intuition. Without the former there would be no thought and, therefore, no cognition; without the latter there would be nothing to be thought” (*ivi*, p. 13). Allison’s analysis, moreover, closely links transcendental realism to the denial of the discursivity thesis, and transcendental idealism to its affirmation (cf. *ivi*, p. 27).

¹⁴¹ AA 10:129.

¹⁴² AA 10:130.

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.¹⁴³

In other words, Kant realized that he had so far neglected a fundamental question, regarding the ground of the relation between a representation and the object represented. This problem became much more severe in the case of purely intellectual objects, i.e., the traditional objects of metaphysics: for in the case of sensible objects, the representation of those object is made possible by the affection by the object on our sensible faculty; when it came to purely intellectual representations, however, Kant glimpsed the risk that the ground of the relation between the (intellectual) object and the representation was lacking. This relationship would be understandable “if the object itself were created by the representation (as when divine cognitions are conceived as the archetypes of things)”, i.e., as is the case with the *intellectus archetypus* (“an intellect whose intuition is itself the ground of things”); but since “our understanding, through its representations, is neither the cause of the object [...], nor is the object cause of our intellectual representations in the real sense”, whence comes the agreement between intellectual representations and their objects, when it cannot be reached with the aid of experience? Kant continues:

I had said: The sensuous representations present things as they appear, the intellectual representations present them as they are. But by what means are these things given to us, if not by the way in which they affect us? And if such intellectual representations depend on our inner activity, whence comes the agreement that they are supposed to have with objects – objects that are nevertheless not possibly produced thereby?¹⁴⁴

Falling this ground of the relation, the infallibility of intellectual representations also falls, i.e., their ability to represent things as they are in themselves: “this question, of how the faculty of the understanding achieves this conformity with the things themselves is still left in a state of obscurity”¹⁴⁵. Following Karin de Boer’s accurate reading, between 1770 and 1772 Kant must have realized that “*pure sensibility is indispensable to obtain cognition proper* because it is precisely the act of synthesis carried out in pure time that allows the mind to objectify representations, that is, to attribute them to an *object*”¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴³ AA 10:130-131.

¹⁴⁴ For this and previous quotations: *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ De Boer, 2020, pp. 63-64.

Therefore, intellectual concepts are not anymore considered as actually able to represent things as they are in themselves, but merely able to represent “ways in which objects can be *thought*”¹⁴⁷: in other words, intellectual representations are still possible, but they do not amount to representations of things as they are in themselves¹⁴⁸. In a note dated between 1772 and 1773, Kant writes: “things that cannot be given to us through any experience are nothing for us”¹⁴⁹.

This letter to Herz marks the emergence in Kant of a position, later definitively achieved in 1781, known as “discursivity thesis”: to obtain cognition proper, i.e., for a cognition to be objectively valid, the contribution from both understanding and sensibility is required. In Kant’s famous words from the *KrV*, “without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind”¹⁵⁰.

Strong in this novel insight into “the key to the whole secret of metaphysics”¹⁵¹, Kant proclaims to Herz:

[...] now I am in a position to bring out a critique of pure reason that will deal with the nature of theoretical as well as practical knowledge [...]. Of this, I will first work out the first part, which will deal with the sources of metaphysics, its method and limits. [...] With respect to the first part, I should be in a position to publish it within three months.¹⁵²

As time went by, the critical task that Kant undertook became much more demanding than he had initially envisioned, and the project of a *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* took him another several years before it was eventually finalized in 1781. With the first edition of the work, strengthened by all the theoretical insights developed in his pre-critical years, Kant was finally able to set the problem of metaphysics on a novel theoretical ground: that of transcendental idealism.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Pollok, 2017, p. 54. In the *KrV*, intellectual representations will later be called “categories”, working as constituents of synthetic judgments *a priori*: the latter “function as necessary conditions under which any given proposition may count as objective cognition” (ibid.).

¹⁴⁹ AA 17:618.

¹⁵⁰ A 51 / B 75.

¹⁵¹ AA 10:130.

¹⁵² AA 10:132.

1.2 Transcendental Idealism

The doctrine of transcendental idealism is, according to Kant himself, a central tenet of his thought. On the ground of transcendental idealism, indeed, he builds his solution to the problem of the possibility of metaphysics and of the determination of its scope and limits, as well as his theory of a possible experience; furthermore, he regarded his transcendental idealism as a revolutionary philosophical position that would finally enable to solve long-standing conflicts and disputes between philosophers on issues of greatest interest for human reason¹⁵³.

Notwithstanding this crucial role, the proper interpretation of this aspect of Kant's thought is still nowadays the subject of an ongoing debate: an agreed understanding of transcendental idealism still seems a very distant goal to reach. The aspects of greatest disagreement can be summarized in some fundamental questions: is transcendental idealism a metaphysical or an epistemological position? To what extent can Kant be considered an idealist or a realist? Should the distinction between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich* – one of the key claims of Kant's idealism – be understood according to the idea of “two worlds” or to the idea of “two aspects”?

The main purpose of this section is therefore to engage with the debate about the interpretation of transcendental idealism; through an outline of the dispute between “two-worlds” and “two-aspects” readings, an attempt will be made to present an interpretation of transcendental idealism that points towards an overcoming of the sharp polarization of such debate. The outcome of this discussion will be a proposed reading of transcendental idealism as a moderately metaphysical doctrine whose central claim intends both to distinguish two different approaches to the objects we can encounter within experience and to designate a class of things that can only be thought.

In the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* Kant explicitly presents his doctrine of transcendental idealism in two well-known passages, both in the *Transcendental Dialectic*. The first passage can be found only in the first edition of the work, within the discussion of the *Fourth Paralogism*:

¹⁵³ I sketched an outline of the most significant problems that concerned Kant in his pursuit of a reform of metaphysics in Section 1.1.1.

I understand by the *transcendental idealism* of all appearances the doctrine that they are all together to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves, and accordingly that space and time are only sensible forms of our intuition, but not determinations given for themselves or conditions of objects as things in themselves. To this idealism is opposed *transcendental realism*, which regards space and time as something given in themselves (independent of our sensibility). The transcendental realist therefore represents outer appearances [...] as things in themselves, which would exist independently of us and our sensibility and thus would also be outside us according to pure concepts of the understanding.¹⁵⁴

The context of this passage is the criticism of the paralogism of the ideality of outer relation: the argument for the “ideality of outer appearances”¹⁵⁵, which Kant is here engaged in disproving, is understood by him as grounded on the implicit premise of transcendental realism. Grasping this position is of great importance in order to understand the standpoint that Kant intends to contrast. According to transcendental realism, both space and time and empirical objects are considered as something given in itself, i.e., absolutely mind-independent and existing *per se*: from Kant’s perspective, the crucial flaw of this philosophical standpoint lies in the absolute neglect of the transcendental distinction between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich*. Following Marcus Willaschek’s insightful interpretation of transcendental realism, it is a “tacit assumption” in philosophy, within which “the structure of reality corresponds to that of rational thought”: therefore, “the regulative principles of reason that govern how we rationally *think* about objects must appear to be constitutive principles that characterize how those *objects* really are”¹⁵⁶; in a word, the subjective conditions describing the functioning of human knowledge are interpreted as objective conditions describing the way reality is constituted in itself. Willaschek’s analysis, furthermore, closely links the assumption of transcendental realism with the already-mentioned transcendental illusion, a “natural and unavoidable illusion”, consisting precisely in mistaking subjective principles of reason for objective ones. It is properly the task of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, accordingly, to uncover the illusion “in transcendental judgements” and, at the same time, to protect “us from being deceived by it”¹⁵⁷.

¹⁵⁴ A 369.

¹⁵⁵ A 367.

¹⁵⁶ Willaschek, 2018, p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ For this and the previous quotation: A 297-298 / B 354.

The other relevant passage for Kant's portrayal of transcendental idealism can be found in the sixth section of the *Antinomy of Pure Reason*, whose title is precisely *Transcendental idealism as the key to solving the cosmological dialectic*:

We have sufficiently proved in the Transcendental Aesthetic that everything intuited in space or in time, hence all objects of an experience possible for us, are nothing but appearances, i.e., mere representations, which, as they are represented, as extended beings or series of alterations, have outside our thoughts no existence grounded in itself. This doctrine I call *transcendental idealism*.¹⁵⁸

On a first, very general reading, therefore, transcendental idealism seems to entail two fundamental claims:

- 1) The transcendental distinction between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich*;
- 2) Kantian idealism, i.e., the claim that:
 - a. Empirical objects are appearances and not things in themselves;
 - b. Space and time are pure forms of intuition and not things in themselves.

As Kant himself points out in the passage quoted above, however, the building place of the foundations of transcendental idealism is the *Transcendental Aesthetic*. There he refers to the theory he proposed as a “theory of the ideality of outer as well as inner sense, thus of all objects of the sense, as mere appearances”¹⁵⁹. When drawing conclusions from his expositions of space and time, Kant claims their “*empirical reality*”, i.e., their “objective validity in regard to all objects that may ever be given to our senses”¹⁶⁰; but nonetheless, their “*transcendental ideality*” consists in their being “nothing at all, if one abstracts from the subjective conditions of sensible intuition”¹⁶¹, i.e., “in regard to things when they are considered in themselves”¹⁶².

¹⁵⁸ A 490-491 / B 518-519. Again in this context, transcendental idealism is characterized in relation to its opposite, i.e., transcendental realism. While the former allows to solve the transcendental illusion and the conflicts in which otherwise reason would remain entangled, the latter is precisely the cause of that mistake and of its consequences.

¹⁵⁹ B 66. This passage was added in the second edition.

¹⁶⁰ A 35 / B 52.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² A 28 / B 44.

1.2.1 *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich*

To make sense of the aforementioned claims, it is essential to point out that the real guiding thread through the whole *Transcendental Aesthetic* is the “transcendental distinction [*transzendentaler Unterschied*]” between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich*. The importance that Kant assigns to it can be grasped by the fact that he gives it the role of a “great divide” in his conception of philosophy: before his *KrV*, ignorance of it was inevitable¹⁶³. According to an already quoted passage from the *Preface* to the second edition, the critique has taught “that the object should be taken in a twofold meaning [*zweierlei Bedeutung*], namely as appearance [*Erscheinung*] or as thing in itself [*Ding an sich selbst*]”¹⁶⁴. This distinction was revealed to be necessary in order to avoid the contradictions¹⁶⁵ arising from always intending objects in just one and the same meaning, “namely as a thing in general [*Ding überhaupt*]”¹⁶⁶.

Notwithstanding the relevance of this thesis for Kant’s philosophy, the proper interpretation of the distinction between *Ding an sich* and *Erscheinung* (and, with it, of transcendental idealism as such) has been a major controversial issue ever since the publication of the *KrV*. It was already noticeable among Kant’s earliest readers¹⁶⁷ how different understandings of the role of the *Ding an sich* led to entirely different understandings of the Kantian doctrine as a whole, often resulting in extremely divergent consequences. Readings of transcendental idealism seemed to fluctuate between two drastic alternatives: either it was taken to be a form of strong realism, or it was understood as a mere version of radical idealism or skepticism. More specifically, as neatly summed up by Jacobi’s well-known dilemma, the very notion of thing in itself was considered to be problematic, seen as an expression of insurmountable contradictions intrinsic to Kant’s position: the thing in itself appeared to be *both* indispensable *and* inadmissible within his system, since without its presupposition it was impossible to enter the system, but with it

¹⁶³ Cf. Allison, 2004, p. 23.

¹⁶⁴ B xxvii.

¹⁶⁵ For example, as Kant points out, saying that the human soul, as “one and the same thing”, is and is not free (B xxviii).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ For a comprehensive account of the dispute about the *Ding an sich* problem in Kant’s early readers, see Karamatsou, 2023.

it was impossible to stay within it¹⁶⁸. Underlying this kind of attacks, there are misguided interpretations of the meaning and function of appearances and things in themselves: among the first readers of the *Kritik*, the majority of them embraced what can be said a “phenomenalist” interpretation¹⁶⁹, according to which *Erscheinungen* are understood as mental entities having no existence outside of our mind; in this perspective, the *Ding an sich* is seen as the “dogmatic residue” in Kant’s critical philosophy that prevents him from encompassing a fully idealist position. Seen from a Kantian perspective, the later struggle of German idealism against the very notion of a thing in itself would signify misunderstanding and neglecting Kant’s key insight that, in Martin Heidegger’s words, “to the nature of man necessarily belongs appearance”¹⁷⁰.

As mentioned above, however, interpreting transcendental idealism appears to be a challenge for contemporary readers too, since “Kant scholarship has yet to have been overcome by consensus”¹⁷¹. As Lucy Allais points out, interpretations “vary so wildly that sometimes it scarcely seems possible that they are all interpretations of the same philosophical account of the relation between mind and world, put forward by the same philosopher, largely in one book”¹⁷². To account for the intricacy of the problem, firstly a fundamental outline of the contemporary debate around the transcendental distinction will be sketched out.

1.2.1.1 “Two worlds” or “two aspects”?

A first important, now well consolidated distinction in the debate is that between so-called “two-objects” (or “two-worlds”) readings and so-called “two-aspects” (or “one-world”) readings. The questions underlying the development of this discussion are the

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Jacobi, 2019. Jacobi’s target was the alleged inconsistency between the necessity to admit an affection by things in themselves and the unknowability of the latter. In more detail, in his reading a “noumenal explanation” (i.e., an explanation of the affection of our mind from things in themselves) was necessary within Kant’s system (since an appearance, i.e., a mere representation, cannot affect our senses), but at the same it was impossible to admit it, because of Kant’s prohibition to rightfully apply categories (as those of cause and effect) to things in themselves. In a nutshell: Kant’s philosophy cannot account for affection by things in themselves, since this would entail applying the category of causality to things in themselves, which is explicitly forbidden by Kant. For this reason, the notion of a thing in itself should rather be dismissed.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Karamatsou, 2023, p. 53.

¹⁷⁰ Heidegger, 1991, XVIII, p. 275, my translation.

¹⁷¹ Ameriks, 1992b, p. 329.

¹⁷² Allais, 2004, p. 655.

following: what is the relationship between things in themselves and appearances? Is there a relationship of numerical identity or rather difference?

According to “two-objects” interpreters¹⁷³, *Erscheinungen* and *Dinge an sich* are two ontologically distinct kinds of objects: by one side, things in themselves are mind-independent entities, existing regardless of our representing them; in short, *Dinge an sich* are seen as things that exist in themselves. By the other side, appearances are interpreted as mere representations, i.e., as subject-dependent mental entities; their existence can be reduced to their being represented through sensible intuitions. For this latter reason, “two-worlds” views are often associated with phenomenalism, according to which empirical objects are nothing outside of our mind, since they are simply the subject’s representations: the properties of the objects of our experience are “fully grounded in our own representations”, that is, they are entirely mind-dependent¹⁷⁴. In this regard, Allais speaks of “mentalizing appearances”¹⁷⁵. “Two-worlds” readings, moreover, feature a “noumenalist” aspect insofar as they interpret things in themselves as existing, non-spatiotemporal entities which are explicitly different from appearances, meaning that these two kinds of objects are numerically distinct and non-overlapping. This is the reason why this type of reading can be considered as a metaphysical interpretation of transcendental idealism. For a long time, the “two-worlds” view has represented the standard interpretation of Kantian idealism, being the historically most prevalent one. The aforementioned criticism by Jacobi, expressed in his *David Hume über den Glauben oder Idealismus und Realismus*, can be seen as implicitly committing to this phenomenalist, “two-worlds” view, since it interprets Kantian *Erscheinungen* as merely mental entities, whose existence is immanent to the representation, and contrasts them with *Dinge an sich* understood as external objects, transcending the representation¹⁷⁶. As Marialena Karampatsou’s analysis points out, the great majority of Kant’s early critics shares adherence to this interpretative paradigm¹⁷⁷, according to which appearances and things in themselves are two separate domains of entities, being, therefore, numerically distinct.

¹⁷³ For examples of this position, see Guyer, 1987, Jankowiak, 2017, Strawson, 2019 and Van Cleve, 1999.

¹⁷⁴ Rosefeldt, 2022, p. 20. Rosefeldt clarifies this view through a powerful example: “According to phenomenalism, the perceived cube exists and has the properties it actually has because our representations of it exist and have the properties they actually have [...]” (ibid.).

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Allais, 2004, pp. 657, 660, 663, 673, 681.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Karampatsou, 2023, pp. 53, 217.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. ibid.

“Two-aspects” views¹⁷⁸, on the other hand, interpret the distinction between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich* as one between two aspects of the very same object: things appear to us as being in a certain way, i.e., as *Erscheinungen*, but they have a certain way in which they are *an sich*, the latter remaining unknown to us. Accordingly, appearances are things as represented by us in sensible intuition, while things in themselves are the very same things, considered independently of how (and whether) we represent them. Following this account, there are not two distinct realms of things (that of appearances and that of things in themselves), but rather only “one world”, which can be regarded under two different viewpoints (as appearances and as things in themselves). This second, broad strand of the debate seems to have become more successful since the middle of the last century.

Beneath the “two-aspects” label, however, a number of different alternatives are comprised, often leading to significantly divergent interpretative outcomes. “One-world” views, therefore, cannot be reduced to a single, clear-cut position, but rather each reading should be thoroughly assessed in its own peculiarity.

In stark contrast to the metaphysical “two-worlds” view, stands the methodological “two-aspects” reading: initiating with Gerold Prauss’ seminal work¹⁷⁹, it later found its main representative in Henry E. Allison. According to his interpretation, first of all, transcendental idealism is understood as an “epistemological or perhaps ‘metaepistemological’” idealism¹⁸⁰. A reading of this kind,

requires that the transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves be understood as holding between two ways of *considering* things (as they appear and as they are in themselves) rather than as [...] between two ontologically distinct sets of entities (appearances and things in themselves).¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Under this broad classification we can include, e.g., Allison, 2004, Allais, 2004, Bird, 1962, Collins, 1999, Langton, 1998, Prauss, 1974 and Rosefeldt, 2022.

¹⁷⁹ Prauss, 1974.

¹⁸⁰ Allison, 2004, p. 4.

¹⁸¹ Ivi, p. 16.

This interpretation seems to be plausible if, as Prauss' previous study¹⁸² had pointed out, it is true that the different locutions¹⁸³ employed by Kant in discussing things in themselves are all synonyms for the canonical expression "*Ding an sich selbst betrachtet*", in which "*an sich selbst*" is employed adverbially. Accordingly, the distinction between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich* involves two complementary ways of regarding *one and the same thing*. This twofold standpoint is made necessary by the limitation of human cognition to objects of a possible experience. Considering things as they are in themselves, in fact, means to consider them independently of our epistemic conditions, i.e., "in abstraction from the conditions of our cognition": since our thought can abstract from them, it can form a concept of things as they are in themselves¹⁸⁴. Conversely, considering things as *Erscheinungen* simply means considering them in relation to such epistemic conditions, i.e., "considering them in the way in which they are presented to discursive knowers with our forms of sensibility"¹⁸⁵. Therefore, according to this reading, the transcendental distinction is not meant to capture any ontological difference between its two elements; and besides, "Kant's talk of things in themselves does not carry any ontological commitment with respect to a realm of reality beyond that of empirical objects"¹⁸⁶.

Moreover, Prauss and Allison's methodological interpretations must be distinguished from so-called ontological "two-aspects" readings¹⁸⁷: in line with this interpretation, the distinction between *Erscheinungen* and *Dinge an sich* is between two kinds of properties¹⁸⁸, the former being mind-dependent and the latter mind-independent. In Tobias Rosefeldt's words,

The basic idea of this interpretation is that Kant's distinction between appearances and things in themselves amounts to a distinction between two kinds of properties that both belong to the same objects: mind-independent properties, which have to do with the way things appear to us, on the one hand, and

¹⁸² Prauss, 1974, p. 20.

¹⁸³ "*Ding an sich*", "*Ding an sich selbst*", "*Ding an sich selbst betrachtet*". According to Prauss, also the expressions "*Object an sich*", "*Gegenstand an sich*", "*Sache an sich*" can all be considered as synonyms for the same fundamental meaning, namely a "thing considered in itself" (cf. *ivi*, pp. 13-21).

¹⁸⁴ Allison, 2004, p. 18.

¹⁸⁵ *Ivi*, p. 16.

¹⁸⁶ Rosefeldt, 2024, p. 3. As Prauss puts it, the *Ding an sich* is not a "hypostatization of a metaphysical background world [*Hypostasierung einer metaphysischen Hinterwelt*]" (Prauss, 1974, p. 30).

¹⁸⁷ Examples of this position include Allais, 2004, 2015, Collins, 1999, Langton, 1998, Rosefeldt, 2022, 2024.

¹⁸⁸ "Property" is the translation for "*Beschaffenheit*", used by Kant, e.g., at B 69.

mind-independent properties, which have to do with how things are independently of how they appear to us, on the other.¹⁸⁹

Since appearances of things are mind-dependent, their ontological status is radically different “from the mind-independent intrinsic nature of things”¹⁹⁰, which we cannot know. It is important to point out how, according to this reading, the distinction still holds between two different aspects (and not between two numerically distinct entities), as the epistemological “two-aspects” view considers; unlike the latter, however, this position regards the distinction as capturing some ontological difference between these two levels. More specifically, the mind-dependence of *Erscheinungen* consists in their amounting to properties “that pertain to objects only in relation to epistemic subjects of a certain kind” (i.e., human epistemic subjects); the mind-independence of *Dinge an sich*, instead, consists in their being properties that pertain to objects as they are in themselves, i.e., “which are independent of our epistemic relation to them”¹⁹¹. Rosefeldt also translates mind-dependent properties into response-dependent properties, meaning properties of objects that have to do with the way we react to them; on the other hand, mind-independent properties are response-independent ones, that is ones that the objects hold independently of our reacting to them¹⁹².

For the following reasons, ontological “two-aspects” interpretations of this kind seem to convey a compelling reading of transcendental idealism.

In the first place, for the abovementioned motives, they acknowledge an ontological difference between *Erscheinungen* and *Dinge an sich* without disentangling them into two separate kinds of entities, as “two-worlds” readers do.

Secondly, they have the major advantage of avoiding phenomenalist consequences associated with “two-objects” views, and therefore they can account for

¹⁸⁹ Rosefeldt, 2022, p. 25.

¹⁹⁰ Allais, 2004, p. 681.

¹⁹¹ Rosefeldt, 2016, pp. 195-196.

¹⁹² Consider, as Rosefeldt does, an analogy with the property of being poisonous: the source of our reaction to something poisonous is its “first-order”, response-independent property (e.g., of having a certain specific chemical composition); but the “higher-order” property of having such “first-order” property is response-dependent, insofar as it entails its having such-and-such effects on us. In other words, the poisonous object is not poisonous in itself, in the sense that it is poisonous for us. Note that this example is appropriate merely for analogical purposes, since, of course, the chemical composition of a substance is still, in the Kantian sense, an empirical property and therefore it is knowable for us; to grasp the meaning of the example, the distinction must be taken to an even more fundamental level (cf. *ibid.*).

Kant's empirical realism¹⁹³. *Erscheinungen* cannot be merely mental items, since Kant's target in passages such as the *Refutation of idealism*¹⁹⁴ is precisely the mentalization of empirically real objects. Coherently, this reading does justice to both the realist and the idealist side of Kant's doctrine, the former lying in his empirical realism, the latter in the already-mentioned claim that "everything intuited in space or in time, hence all objects of an experience possible for us, are nothing but appearances"¹⁹⁵, i.e., they are, to some extent, mind-dependent.

Thirdly, they can account for Kant's both epistemological and metaphysical concern: as rightly argued by Allais, the *KrV* deals with *both* epistemological questions (like determining the *a priori* conditions of empirical cognitions, or the extent to which our cognition can reach) *as well as* metaphysical questions about the nature of reality¹⁹⁶. Kant's transcendental idealism is based on epistemological considerations, but entails important metaphysical claims, such as the commitment to the existence of an aspect of reality which we cannot cognize. As Kant points out in the closing section of the *Transcendental Analytic*, entitled *On the ground of the distinction of all objects in general into phenomena and noumena*:

This was the result of the entire *Transcendental Aesthetic*, and it also follows naturally from the concept of an appearance in general that something must correspond to it which is not in itself appearance, for appearance can be nothing for itself and outside of our kind of representation; this, if there is not to be a constant circle, the word "appearance" must already indicate a relation to something the immediate representation of which is, to be sure, sensible, but which in itself, without this constitution of our sensibility (on which the form of our intuition is grounded), must be something, i.e., an object independent of sensibility.¹⁹⁷

Shortly before in the text, moreover, he had claimed that "if the senses merely represent something to us *as it appears*, then this something must also be in itself a thing"¹⁹⁸. In truth, Kant had already prepared the ground for such a position when he had stated in the second *Preface* that his "experiment of pure reason" (i.e., the transcendental

¹⁹³ The issue of Kant's empirical realism will be dealt with in Section 1.2.2.

¹⁹⁴ B 274-279. See also B 69.

¹⁹⁵ A 491 / B 519.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Allais, 2015, pp. 3-30.

¹⁹⁷ A 251-252.

¹⁹⁸ A 249.

distinction itself) had the outcome of “leaving the thing in itself as something actual for itself but uncognized by us”¹⁹⁹.

According to Karl Ameriks, this metaphysical commitment is entirely neglected by epistemological “two-aspects” interpreters, since they do

injustice to the fact that Kant clearly does believe in and speak of (which is not the same thing as making particular theoretical assertions about²⁰⁰) the absolute reality of things in themselves with substantive non-spatio-temporal characteristics.²⁰¹

Unlike the latter, the ontological “two-aspects” reading allows us to see transcendental idealism as a combination “of metaphysical and epistemological claims”²⁰². Accordingly, in the light of this reading the transcendental distinction is understood as holding between two aspects of one and the same thing: by one side, the mind-dependent aspect of reality that makes up the domain of a possible experience for us; by the other side, the mind-independent, unknowable aspect of the same reality.

Fourthly, ontological “two-aspects” readings seem to suit very well with the results of Rosefeldt’s recent “investigation on the linguistic forms in which Kant expresses his transcendental idealism”²⁰³, aimed at correcting Prauss’ analysis; the flaw of the latter, he contends, lies in the claim that the standard complement of the formula “*an sich*” consists in verbs of philosophical consideration²⁰⁴. Rosefeldt’s re-examination of the adverbial occurrences of the expression “*an sich*” in Kant’s works shows that the assumption that “*Ding an sich*” is the abbreviation for the standard form “*Ding an sich selbst betrachtet*” is nothing but an “interpretational myth”²⁰⁵. Rather, we should read the expression “things in themselves” in the sense of “things that have their properties in themselves”, thus supporting the idea that “every empirical object is also somehow constituted in itself [...] and that it must be so constituted in order to appear to us”²⁰⁶.

¹⁹⁹ B xx-xxi.

²⁰⁰ I will return in more detail on the possibility of theoretical assertions which remain distinct from cognition in Chapter 3.

²⁰¹ Ameriks, 1992b, p. 334.

²⁰² Allais, 2015, p. 11. See also pp. 6-15.

²⁰³ Rosefeldt, 2024, p. 1.

²⁰⁴ E.g., “*betrachten*”, “*ansehen*”, “*erwägen*”.

²⁰⁵ Rosefeldt, 2024, p. 12.

²⁰⁶ Ivi, p. 15.

Lastly, for the abovementioned reasons the ontological “two-aspects” reading can be described as a *moderate* interpretation. In line with this idea, Ameriks recognized the possibility of a reading that seeks to acknowledge the weaknesses of each of the major lines of interpretation, while still incorporating the strengths of each of them²⁰⁷; thereby it avoids drifting into extreme interpretations on both sides. What is most important, the ontological “two-aspects” view accounts for the complexity of transcendental idealism, consisting of its ability to mediate between contrasting philosophical instances.

Notwithstanding these undeniable merits of the ontological “two-aspects” view, however, in the variant presented by Rosefeldt there are some aspects that paradigmatically arouse some perplexity. As shown, Rosefeldt’s interpretation embraces the reading of the relationship between appearances and things in themselves as a relationship between mind-dependent (or response-dependent) properties and mind-independent (or response-independent) properties belonging to the same object. A first issue raised by this reading concerns its consequences for so-called non-empirical objects. In his interpretation, in fact, the distinction between *Erscheinungen* and *Dinge an sich* “amounts to a distinction between two kinds of properties that both belong to the same object”²⁰⁸, consistently with the idea that, as an already-quoted passage made clear, “every empirical object is also somehow constituted in itself [...] and that it must be so constituted in order to appear to us”²⁰⁹. However: how can it be certain that to every thing in itself corresponds an appearance? In other words: how can it be certain that everything that is constituted in itself in a certain way finds expression for us in the form of an empirical object? Proving this is by definition impossible, because we cannot cognize things in themselves. On the contrary, Kant’s philosophy certainly makes room for the possibility of non-empirical objects, i.e., objects that, in principle, could never meet the conditions of a possible experience for us, but which, nevertheless, we have the possibility to think. In a nutshell, there is more to reality in itself than just what can come under our senses and become an appearance for us. Coherently, there is more to transcendental idealism than just a theory of a possible experience for us: a reading of this doctrine should be able to account for Kant’s acknowledgement of a space for those things in themselves that cannot, by their very essence, be appearances. Presenting “transcendental

²⁰⁷ Cf. Ameriks, 2012, p. 101.

²⁰⁸ Rosefeldt, 2022, p. 25.

²⁰⁹ Rosefeldt, 2024, p. 15.

idealism as a theory of response-dependent properties”²¹⁰, therefore, seems to be partial at least, since it only describes Kant’s positioning with respect to empirical objects.

A second issue comes from the fact that in Rosefeldt’s interpretation things in themselves, as response-independent, “objective” properties, should be able to ground the corresponding appearances, i.e., response-dependent, “subjective” properties. This idea, however, seems to give rise to an objection similar to the one Berkeley addresses to Locke regarding his distinction between primary and secondary qualities. In *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Locke describes secondary qualities of things as “such Qualities, which in truth are nothing in the Objects themselves, but Powers to produce various Sensations in us by their primary Qualities”; the latter qualities, instead, are “utterly inseparable from the Body”, meaning they pertain to the object itself²¹¹. Rosefeldt describes his response-independent properties, as an interpretation of Kantian things in themselves, as “properties that pertain to objects as they are in themselves, and which are independent of our epistemic relation to them”; and appearances, qua response-dependent properties, as “properties of objects that essentially have to do with the way we react to them”, “higher-order properties of having some first-order property that elicits a certain effect in us”²¹². The very notion of a mind-independent property seems to be prone to the same objection that Berkeley raises against Lockean primary qualities²¹³: no distinction can be made between “original” and “secondary” qualities, since all the qualities of an object are in truth “secondary”, i.e., “subjective”, mind-dependent. Qualities always occur together in perception, therefore it is not possible for some to be “objective”, i.e., inherent to the object, and for others to be “subjective”, i.e., dependent on the reaction of an epistemic subject to them. In other words, not only secondary qualities are subject-dependent: rather, all qualities, including the “primary” or “original” ones, depend on the reaction of an epistemic subject to them. Rosefeldt’s “properties” could be prone to a similar objection: if the very notion of a property (like that of a quality) implies, to a greater or lesser extent, its subject-dependence, then to speak of things in themselves as response-independent properties is self-contradictory, since all properties are, somehow, response-dependent. For these reasons, it seems that the very talk of

²¹⁰ Rosefeldt, 2022, p. 30.

²¹¹ Locke, 1990, pp. 134-135.

²¹² Rosefeldt, 2016, pp. 195-196.

²¹³ Berkeley, 1969, pp. 137-138.

“properties” in the attempt to interpret things in themselves could be inadequate, since clearly inconsistent with the actual mind-independence and unknowability that Kant assigns to them. It would be better, therefore, to avoid the very reference to “properties” in the attempt to interpret Kantian *Dinge an sich*, and to prefer a different account of their role in transcendental idealism. The consequences of an objection like that of Berkeley against Locke’s secondary qualities, leading to his subjectivist and immaterialist idealism, are extremely dangerous for a reading of Kant’s transcendental idealism, since a major concern in the *KrV* was precisely to reject Berkeleyan dogmatic idealism²¹⁴ and to secure the reality of the external world against the threat of skepticism. Great importance in Kant’s doctrine as a whole, in fact, must be acknowledged to his empirical realism.

1.2.2 Empirical realism

A comprehensive reading of transcendental idealism should not overlook another crucial aspect of this doctrine, namely Kant’s empirical realism. This strand of Kant’s theory undertakes the role of providing an answer to the need for a demonstration of the reality of the external world. This purpose was undoubtedly central to Kant’s program in the *KrV*, and it became even more so in the transition to the second edition, where he modified some sections (including the *Fourth Paralogism*) and introduced further clarifications to address some of the objections of (material) idealism that had been raised against him. Accordingly, in the second *Preface*, when he presents the additions he made “in the form of a new refutation of psychological *idealism*”, he describes the lack of a “satisfactory proof” of “the existence of things outside us” as “a scandal of philosophy and universal human reason”²¹⁵. Three key passages represent Kant’s attempt to provide a positive solution to this problem: in two of them (the already-mentioned *Fourth Paralogism* as in the first edition and the sixth section of the *Antinomy of Pure Reason*) empirical realism is introduced alongside the presentation of transcendental idealism, as

²¹⁴ In the *Refutation of Idealism*, Kant presents Berkeley’s dogmatic idealism as a “theory that declares the existence of objects in space outside us to be [...] false and impossible”; furthermore, this material idealism “declares space, together with all the things to which it is attached as an inseparable condition, to be something that is impossible in itself”, and “also declares things in space to be merely imaginary”. This outcome is, according to Kant, “unavoidable if one regards space as a property that is to pertain to the things in themselves” (B 274-275).

²¹⁵ B xxxix.

a straightforward consequence of the latter; a third passage (the *Refutation of Idealism*), as announced by Kant himself, can be found only in the second edition of the work, as a result of his confrontation with the objections raised by his first readers, most of all those from the *Göttinger Rezension* by Feder and Garve.

In the *First Paralogism* as in the first edition, Kant is concerned with tracing the origins of the problem of the existence of the outer world back to transcendental realism, with its ignorance of the distinction between *Erscheinungen* and *Dinge an sich*. He will therefore engage in refuting the doctrine of the “ideality of outer appearances”²¹⁶ by showing that only his revolutionary position, namely transcendental idealism, can provide a demonstration of the reality of the external world.

The transcendental idealist [...] can be an empirical realist, hence, as he is called, a dualist, i.e., he can concede the existence of matter without going beyond mere self-consciousness and assuming something more than the certainty of representations in me, hence the *cogito, ergo sum*.²¹⁷

By contrast, the transcendental realist, by representing “outer appearances [...] as things in themselves” outside us, “afterwards plays the empirical idealist”²¹⁸, since he “regards the objects of outer sense as something different from the senses themselves”, something that is found “external to us”²¹⁹:

If we let outer objects count as things in themselves, then it is absolutely impossible to comprehend how we are to acquire cognition of their reality outside us, since we base this merely on the representation, which is in us. For one cannot have sensation outside oneself, but only in oneself, and the whole of self-consciousness therefore provides nothing other than merely our own determinations.²²⁰

Transcendental realism, therefore, when it comes to the outer world, cannot but lead to empirical idealism, precisely the doctrine that Kant is here concerned to disprove. It is rather the premises of transcendental idealism that allow him to set the problem on a new footing: “the transcendental idealist is an empirical realist, and grants to matter, as

²¹⁶ A 367.

²¹⁷ A 370.

²¹⁸ A 369.

²¹⁹ A 371.

²²⁰ A 378.

appearance, a reality which need not be inferred, but is immediately perceived”²²¹.
Furthermore:

Every outer perception therefore immediately proves something real in space, or rather is itself the real; to that extent, empirical realism is beyond doubt, i.e., to our outer intuitions there corresponds something real in space.²²²

In the sixth section of the *Antinomy of Pure Reason*, once again Kant ensures that “in space and time [...] the empirical truth of appearances is satisfactorily secured”, since “transcendental idealism [...] allows that the objects of outer intuition are real too, just as they are intuited in space”, and the same applies for time²²³.

When discussing the second postulate of empirical thinking in general, according to which “that which is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation) is *actual*”²²⁴, Kant introduces in the second edition an additional section aimed at providing some clarification of his position on the question of the existence of the outer world, an issue in respect of which he had received some accusations of idealism. For this reason, the new section is precisely entitled “*Refutation of Idealism*”: his efforts here are aimed at the demonstration of the theorem according to which “*the mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me*”²²⁵. While “material” idealism regards the existence of objects in space as “doubtful and indemonstrable” (in its *problematic* version) or “false and impossible” (in its *dogmatic* variant), Kant’s transcendental idealism can provide the means to demonstrate that “we have experience and not merely imagination of outer things”; the strategy he adopts consists in proving that “our inner experience [...] is possible under the presupposition of outer experience”²²⁶. Accordingly, his demonstration relies on the immediacy of experience: “all time-determination presupposes something persistent in perception” and “the perception of this persistent thing is possible only through a thing outside me”²²⁷; but because “we do not have anything persistent [...] except merely

²²¹ A 371.

²²² A 375.

²²³ A 491 / B 520.

²²⁴ A 218 / B 266.

²²⁵ B 275.

²²⁶ B 274-275.

²²⁷ Ibid.

matter”, which is not taken from experience but rather “presupposed *a priori* as the necessary condition of all time-determination”²²⁸, then it follows that “inner experience in general is possible only through outer experience in general”²²⁹. In other words: as shown by Descartes, “I am conscious of my existence as determined in time”²³⁰ (through the representation “*I am*”); but for “a determinate consciousness of our self” to be possible, “the existence of outer objects is required”²³¹. In this way, Kant considers as proven the existence of objects in space as appearances, and material idealism as refuted.

Drawing on the analysis of these significant passages, it is possible to see how Kant contrasts two different types of realism: on the one hand, transcendental realism can be classified as a type of realism regarding things in themselves, i.e., according to it we are directly acquainted, in our experience, with things as they are in themselves, the latter being real objects existing outside us. On the other hand, empirical realism can be considered a kind of realism regarding appearances, i.e., according to it we are acquainted with empirical objects as appearances existing in space and time, the latter being considered as pure intuitions grounding our sensibility; in Dietmar Heidemann’s clarifying words, Kant is committed “to the existence of objects in space independent of us but under the transcendental conditions of experience”²³²: this reveals that his empirical realism is made possible on the basis of transcendental idealism, as Kant himself repeatedly claims. Furthermore, according to Heidemann’s careful analysis, transcendental realism and empirical realism can be fruitfully interpreted through the means of a distinction between a metaphysical and a non-metaphysical realism²³³. Transcendental realism can be considered a *metaphysical* form of realism, since it considers outer objects to possess a *mind-independent* existence, it regards predicates as “actuality” or “existence” as *independent* on what we are able to cognize, and it is committed to a *correspondence* between our propositions about the outer world and facts in the outer world, “such that every meaningful statement about the world is either true or false”²³⁴. Empirical realism, instead, can be considered a *non-metaphysical* form of

²²⁸ B 278.

²²⁹ B 278-279.

²³⁰ B 275.

²³¹ B 278.

²³² Heidemann, 2019, p. 3235.

²³³ Cf. *ivi*, pp. 3243-3244.

²³⁴ Cf. *ivi*, p. 3245. For this classification, Heidemann is employing three different criteria: the ontological criterion “defines whether a particular form of realism takes the world to exist dependently or independently

realism for the following reasons: firstly, as transcendental realism, it considers outer objects to be mind-independently existent, but, unlike it, “outer objects” are understood as appearances, and not as things in themselves (they are, therefore, mind-independent as far as their existence is concerned, but *mind-dependent* to the extent that their being appearances depends on the presence of the epistemic conditions of a cognizing subject). Secondly, empirical realism maintains that “reality is *dependent* upon that which we can cognize in general”, so that for something to count as “real” it must conform to the conditions of a possible experience for us. Thirdly, it is committed to a *coherence* between beliefs about the world and transcendental principles of cognition: i.e., beliefs about the world are made true or false by their coherence with transcendental principles of cognition²³⁵.

A non-metaphysical interpretation of Kant’s empirical realism should not be misunderstood as being incompatible with an ontological “two-aspects” interpretation of transcendental idealism, such as the one we have been leaning towards, for the simple reason that the latter manifestly includes a metaphysical commitment to an aspect of reality that we cannot cognize. For sure, empirical realism *per se* is a non-metaphysical position: strictly sticking within the boundaries of this theory, indeed, things in themselves are nothing at all, because, as the second postulate of empirical thinking in general points out, “actual” is only “that which is connected with the material conditions of experience”²³⁶. Put differently, within this background, (empirically) real is only that which belongs to the realm of an experience that is possible for us. If, however, we interpret Kant’s position as a whole, i.e., not merely focusing on his empirical realism, but embracing his transcendental idealism with all its implications altogether, we cannot fail to notice how the transcendental distinction itself implies a metaphysical commitment towards the existence of mind-independent things in themselves, albeit without the realist commitment to the cognizability of the latter (which, instead, characterizes transcendental realism). Therefore, interpreting empirical realism as a non-metaphysical form of realism (in contrast to the metaphysical commitment of transcendental realism) does not at all

of the mind”; the epistemic criterion “specifies whether or not [...] what we conceive as *real* can or cannot go beyond what we can know”; and the veridical criterion “determines [...] whether our beliefs about the world are made true by the world or whether the truth of external world beliefs can only be established within the cognitive theory that underlies them” (ibid.).

²³⁵ Ivi, p. 3246.

²³⁶ A 218 / B 266. On this point, see also Heidemann, 2019, p. 3234.

contradict a reading of transcendental idealism in terms of an ontological “two-aspects” interpretation: Kant’s position guarantees *both* a genuine form of empirical realism *and* a metaphysical commitment to the existence of a mind-independent reality that, nonetheless, remains unknown for us. Indeed, as Kant repeatedly remarks²³⁷, it is precisely the foundation granted by transcendental idealism that grounds the empirical reality of appearances, hence the objectivity of our experience.

Notwithstanding its centrality in the overall context of Kant’s doctrine as a whole, the realist credentials of his position have often been overlooked by scholars, beginning with the very first readers of the *KrV*. The reason behind this lies in the interpretative paradigm which, as Marialena Karampatsou remarks, Kant’s early critics adopted: in contemporary words, it could be described as a “two-worlds” phenomenalist paradigm²³⁸. This is exemplarily displayed in the already-mentioned, well-known *Göttinger Rezension*, where an anonymous critic (later discovered to be Johann Georg Heinrich Feder and Christian Garve) accuses Kantian idealism of being a radical, Berkeleyan variant of idealism²³⁹.

Still today, as Paul Abela observes, “there remains the common belief that Kantian appearances are mind-dependent in a way that effectively excludes empirical realism from being accepted as a genuine form of realism”²⁴⁰. Once again, this is due to a phenomenalist interpretation of the role of appearances within transcendental idealism. Indeed, since Kantian realism is a realism with regard to appearances, it is vital to understand correctly the role of this notion, without misunderstanding its meaning: the different interpretations of Kant’s position with respect to the problem of the external world largely depend on the significance that is associated to this term. Should we adhere to a phenomenalist interpretation of *Erscheinungen*, according to which the latter are mere mental entities, of purely psychological and subjective status, then it is clear that Kant’s position cannot be understood as a genuine form of empirical realism, and the reality of external objects inevitably collapses. Should we, on the other hand, be able to reject a phenomenalist interpretation of transcendental idealism and provide reasons in support

²³⁷ Cf. A 370-371. See also A 491-492 / B 520.

²³⁸ Cf. Karampatsou, 2023, p. 38.

²³⁹ Cf. *ivi*, p. 45.

²⁴⁰ Abela, 2002, p. 1.

of an alternative interpretation, as was done in the previous section²⁴¹, then the status of Kantian appearances can be rehabilitated.

To achieve this aim, and to finally present a reading of transcendental idealism as a whole that simultaneously accounts for all these aspects, it is essential to pass through the consideration of some textual support for a reading of Kant's position that draws close to an ontological "two-aspects" interpretation, in accordance with the guidelines laid out in the previous section. For this purpose, some key passages from the *KrV* will be considered.

1.2.3 Textual evidence

According to transcendental idealism,

The transcendental concept of appearances in space [...] is a critical reminder that absolutely nothing that is intuited in space is a thing in itself [...], but rather the objects in themselves are not known to us at all, and that what we call outer objects are nothing other than mere representations of our sensibility, whose form is space, but whose true correlate, i.e., the thing in itself, is not and cannot be cognized through them, but is also never asked after in experience.²⁴²

In the light of transcendental idealism, "we can have cognition of no object as a thing in itself, but only insofar as *it* is an object of sensible intuition, i.e. as an appearance"²⁴³. In this formulation of "Kantian humility"²⁴⁴, located in the second *Preface*, it is possible to find great support for an ontological "two-aspects" interpretation, since Kant is clearly referring to one and the same thing: an *Erscheinung* seems to be the form that a *Ding an sich* must achieve *for us* in order to become an object of possible experience *for us*. The appearance, therefore, is not something different and separated from the thing in itself, but rather this very same thing, insofar as it manifests itself to us²⁴⁵. Conversely, the thing in itself is not something distinct from the appearance, but

²⁴¹ Cf. *supra*, Section 1.2.1.1.

²⁴² A 40 / B 45.

²⁴³ B xxvi, my emphasis.

²⁴⁴ This expression is borrowed from Langton, 1998.

²⁴⁵ See also B 69-70, where Kant defines an appearance as "what is not to be encountered in the object in itself at all, but is always to be encountered in relation to the subject and is inseparable from the representation of the object".

rather this very same thing that appears, insofar as it is *not* cognizable for us human, finite cognizers. This idea seems to be confirmed when Kant claims that “this object as *appearance* is to be distinguished from itself as object *in itself*”²⁴⁶. This passage from the second edition is even clearer about the numerical identity of *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich*:

[...] if we call certain objects, as appearances, beings of sense (*phaenomena*), because we distinguish the way in which we intuit them from their constitution in itself, then it already follows from our concept that to these we as it were oppose, as objects thought merely through the understanding, either the same objects [*eben dieselbe*] conceived in accordance with the latter constitution, even though we do not intuit it in them, or else other possible things, which are not objects of our senses at all, and call these being of understanding (*noumena*).²⁴⁷

A different formulation for this very same concept can be found where he states that “the things that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be”²⁴⁸. Once again, Kant appears to be talking about the very same things; and yet, at the same time he seems to be capturing some ontological difference between two levels of reality. As rightly pointed out by Karl Ameriks, in Kant’s theory there seems to be a first, fundamental level of reality, constituted by things as they are in themselves: this includes *both* things that, in principle, can become an object of intuition, *and* things that, by their very essence, can merely be thought through our understanding. Both these two classes of entities are entirely mind-independent and incognizable for us: the latter class cannot *at all* be cognized by us, while the former can become an object of cognition for us under the form of appearances. These latter make up a second ontological level, constituted by (some of) the very same things in themselves, insofar as they can be an object of possible experience for us (and, more precisely, only those that actually can – belonging to the first class of things in themselves), i.e., as appearances: this is the empirical world, made up by empirical objects. To this second level of reality can indeed be ascribed an *empirical* reality, since the ontologically “real” status of appearances is guaranteed, first of all, by their accordance and coherence with the transcendental conditions of our

²⁴⁶ B 69.

²⁴⁷ B 306, my emphasis, translation modified. Here I depart from the Guyer-Wood translation, since it translates “*eben dieselbe*” as “other objects”.

²⁴⁸ A 42 / B 59.

experience. The “real” status of appearances, however, *also* finds its source of legitimacy from its being grounded on a more fundamental level of reality, namely that of things in themselves, in the manner described above: things in themselves “appear”, manifest themselves *for us* as appearances because, in order to be cognized by us, they cannot but be subject to *our* epistemic conditions, as human cognitive subjects; and yet, these very same things remain unknown to us as regards what they are in themselves. Coherently, part of our experience is the result of the transforming activity performed by us as human epistemic subjects, possessing transcendental structures which are the conditions that make that very experience possible (space and time and the categories); but another part of our experience depends on the fact that we are inevitably remitted to something given, which, ultimately, lies in the things in themselves. In Leonardo Amoroso’s acute words:

Alongside the awareness of the constructed character of all our experience, there is in Kant an equally radical awareness of our always being referred to something given, to something in the presence of which only experience can take place. [...] The “given” to which we declare ourselves irreducibly remitted is conceivable not as a consistent given in itself, but as a perceivable resistance in the giving of something that is therefore not yet a given.²⁴⁹

For the abovementioned reasons, appearances can be said to be both mind-independent and mind-dependent to some extent: they are mind-independent to the extent that their very existence is grounded in some more fundamental reality, namely things in themselves, which itself is mind-independent; but they are mind-dependent in as much as they cannot but manifest in accordance with the transcendental structures of us human cognizers. And for these very same motives, our experience and cognition can be said to be objective: because they take place within an *empirically real* world.

From these considerations, pointing to an overall interpretation of transcendental idealism, it follows clearly the necessity to rule out a phenomenalist interpretation of Kantian appearances: being grounded *both* in the accordance with our epistemic conditions *and* in the fundamental level of things in themselves, appearances cannot be purely mental entities, representing a merely illusory and subjective mental content. In other words, *Erscheinung* cannot be the same as *bloßer Schein*, i.e., mere illusion: looking at the scenario depicted by Ameriks, it could be said that while *Erscheinungen* belong to

²⁴⁹ Amoroso, 1984, p. 20, my translation.

the ontological level of “determinable, public, and objective spatiotemporal realities”, *bloße Scheine* would pertain to a third, purely subjective level of “indeterminate, private, and merely sensory mental life”²⁵⁰. Put differently: it is certainly true that we cannot have cognition of things as they are in themselves; but renouncing so-called “noumenal cognition” and embracing that we can only know appearances does not at all imply our confinement in our own, private representations. Unlike phenomenalist interpretations seem to imply, *erscheinen* means, for Kant, being an object of empirical intuition²⁵¹. Therefore, even though the objects of a possible experience for us are only appearances, this does not entail that our experience (and, therefore, knowledge) is merely subjective. In Ameriks’s interpretation, Kant’s approach should be interpreted as an “expansive ontological position”, i.e., one that involves “adding more layers of reality than are indisputably needed”. Accordingly, the notion of a *Ding an sich* should not be dramatized: it is not “something that is totally beyond whatever we are acquainted with”²⁵², but rather it is simply the notion of a reality that, to some extent, can become an object of cognition for us in the form of *Erscheinung*, and, to some other extent, must remain unknown for us with respect to what it is independently of our transcendental conditions.

As Martin Heidegger’s insightful interpretation also clarifies, “the thing in itself is not another object but another aspect (*respectus*) of the representation with regard to the same object”²⁵³. Appearances are not mere illusions, but that which exists itself; what is shown in the appearance is the thing in itself²⁵⁴, according to the specific constitution of the epistemic subject: the “essent”, therefore, can be manifest as *Erscheinung* without being known *an sich*²⁵⁵. In Heidegger’s powerful words,

The essent “as it appears” is the same as the essent in itself and only this. Indeed, insofar as it is essent can it become an object, although only to finite knowledge can it be such. It manifests itself thereby in conformity with the manner and scope of the receptive and determinative power at the disposal of finite knowledge.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁰ Ameriks, 2012, pp. 107-109.

²⁵¹ Cf. A 89 / B 121.

²⁵² For this and the previous quotation: Ameriks, 2012, p. 109.

²⁵³ Heidegger, 1962, p. 37.

²⁵⁴ This idea seems to be perfectly coherent with Kant’s later remarks, in the 1790 *Über eine Entdeckung, nach der alle neue Kritik der reinen Vernunft durch eine ältere entbehrlich gemacht werden soll*, that “according to the *Critique*, everything in an appearance is itself still appearance” (AA 08:210).

²⁵⁵ Cf. Heidegger, 1962, p. 37.

²⁵⁶ Ivi, p. 36.

In the appearance we are acquainted with the mind-dependent nature that things manifest according to our epistemic conditions: if we remove the latter, or, as Kant himself points out,

[...] if we remove our own subject or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, then all constitution, all relations of objects in space and time, indeed space and time themselves would disappear, and as appearances they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us.²⁵⁷

The distinction between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich*, as this passage makes clear, should be understood as the outcome of Kant's radical acceptance of the finitude of human knowledge. Meaningfully, Heidegger points out: "the concepts 'appearance' and 'thing in itself', which are fundamental to the *Critique*, can be made intelligible and the object of further investigation only if they are based explicitly on the problematic of the finitude of man"²⁵⁸. The *Erscheinung* necessarily belongs to the finite nature of human cognition, and the possibility of an access to the *Ding an sich* is *absolutely* and *essentially* precluded²⁵⁹. In other words, if our cognition were not limited (and, at the same time, made possible) by transcendental conditions, then there would be no need to distinguish things as they appear to us from things as they are in themselves. This critical, transcendental distinction becomes necessary, however, precisely because human knowledge, due to its constitution and functioning, has limits that it must respect; but within the latter, at the same time, it can never rest content.

1.2.4 Overcoming the dichotomy

The present analysis has shown that the question regarding the proper interpretation of transcendental idealism has assumed, within the context of the contemporary debate, the highly polarized form of a dichotomy between "two-worlds" and "two-aspects" readings. It could be seen that, in fact, the prerequisites for this development were already present immediately after the publication of the *KrV*, when Kant's first readers and critics identified problems and raised objections to his doctrine

²⁵⁷ A 42 / B 59.

²⁵⁸ Heidegger, 1962, p. 39.

²⁵⁹ Cf. *ivi*, p. 38.

that were ultimately dependent on the assumption of a “two-worlds” interpretation, although not explicitly expressed in these terms. This kind of readings is associated with metaphysical interpretations of Kant’s theory, usually implying phenomenalist and noumenalist aspects; the second group, instead, developed in more recent times, provides a predominantly epistemological reading of transcendental idealism. Coherently, metaphysical “two-worlds” interpreters consider the transcendental distinction to be between two numerically distinct objects, constituting two separated domains of entities – that of appearances and that of things in themselves. On the other hand, epistemological “two-aspects” readers interpret the distinction between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich* as holding between two complementary ways of considering the very same things – in accordance or abstracting from our transcendental, epistemic conditions. More recently, in the middle, as it were, between these two extremes, a third alternative has tried to make its way, taking up aspects of both approaches but nevertheless standing as an autonomous position: the ontological “two-aspects” view interprets the distinction as occurring between two different aspects of one and the same thing, but also as capturing an important difference in the ontological status of appearances and things in themselves.

The interpretative indications on transcendental idealism provided so far, however, have eventually revealed a considerable difficulty in being clearly inscribed in the debate thus described, and seem to resist assuming a definitive position within the latter. Both the strengths and the weaknesses of the two “extremes” have been highlighted, showing that each of them leads to problematic consequences for an overall reading of Kant’s position. Even the ontological “two-aspects” reading, which at first appeared very promising because of its ability to integrate positive aspects of the two alternatives, revealed, to a deeper analysis, some limitations that prevent it from being adopted altogether: in the first place, in fact, speaking of things in themselves as mind-independent “properties” seems to be inadequate because of the risks discussed above; furthermore, this position seems to be reductive with respect to the possibility, left entirely open by Kant, of non-empirical objects, since in this kind of reading the realm of things in themselves seems to be restricted to entities that also have the possibility to manifest themselves to us as appearances. In other words: it seems that assuming *any* of the three positions that have been distinguished in the debate – whether it is the metaphysical “two-worlds”, the methodological “two-aspects” or the ontological “two-aspects” reading –

inevitably prevents us from being able to effectively account for all aspects of transcendental idealism: by adopting one rather than the other, something is unavoidably going to be lost.

In light of these considerations, an imperative suspect arises: do the questions underlying this debate *really* guide our research in the proper direction? I.e., do they lead interpreters towards an interpretation of transcendental idealism as close as possible to Kant's genuine thought? Is it assured that the way in which the debate has developed will enable us to approach his position in the proper way? Put differently: should questions about the numerical identity or difference between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich* continue to dominate the current interpretation of Kantian idealism²⁶⁰?

The terms in which these questions underlying the debate between “two-worlds” views and “one-world” views are put do not seem to be entirely adequate. Accordingly, it seems that the most insightful and effective readings of Kant's transcendental idealism stem from interpreters who remain neutral with respect to such debate, who do not explicitly address these questions or, at least, who do not assume them as a starting point from which to interpret Kant's position. Perhaps, then, the leading questions that should underpin an effective interpretation of Kant's idealism do not pertain to the problem of the identity or difference between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich*: rather, they should be directed towards an understanding of the fundamental intentions that led Kant to this position, intentions that were discussed at the opening of this research²⁶¹. His purpose in introducing the transcendental distinction might have been neither to establish a correspondence relationship between two different domains of entities, nor (only) to distinguish two different aspects under which one and the same thing can be considered. It might therefore be necessary to move beyond the stringent polarization of the debate and the terms employed in its formulation: to achieve an adequate understanding of Kant's position, it is compulsory neither to side with “two-worlds” interpreters, nor with “one-world” readers; and even assuming an intermediate position, such as the ontological “two-aspects” view, is not sufficient²⁶², but it seems indispensable to take one more step forward.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Karamatsou, 2023, p. 346.

²⁶¹ Cf. *supra*, Section 1.1.1.

²⁶² Weaknesses of the ontological “two-aspects” view were displayed in Section 1.2.1.1.

A guideline for this advancement is provided by Karin de Boer's enlightening suggestion. This author does "not accept the dichotomy between the 'two-aspect view' [...] and the 'two-object view'", a dichotomy that she ascribes to the stringent framing given to the debate by Henry Allison in his *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*²⁶³. This framing can be traced back to Allison's reductive view (inherited by Gerold Prauss) according to which "Kant uses the term 'thing in itself' *merely* for the purpose of distinguishing two perspectives *on the same things*"²⁶⁴. Seen from this restrictive viewpoint, indeed, the problem of the interpretation of the transcendental distinction stands in the following terms: are *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich* one and the same object, which we consider from two different standpoints, or are they two different objects? In a word: is there a relation of numerical identity or difference between them? The reason behind this lies in the inaccurate presupposition that "the things of which Kant states that they can be considered as they are in themselves must be *the same things* as those that are said to affect the senses"²⁶⁵. Rather, Kant does not reduce the domain of things in themselves to things that can also become objects of a possible experience for us, because they meet the transcendental conditions of our cognition: on the contrary, this category includes *both* things that we can experience as appearances (i.e., things that can fall under our epistemic conditions) *and* things that, on principle, cannot become objects of cognition for us (since they cannot meet those conditions). If only focused on empirical cognition, as Prauss and Allison's approach seems to be, an account of the transcendental distinction cannot but be flawed, or, at least, incomplete: it does not do justice to the fact that Kant "does not wish to reduce the domain of metaphysics to the totality of appearances"²⁶⁶, but rather wants to make room for entities that cannot, for sure, be cognized, but can at least be thought by means of the understanding²⁶⁷. In other words: the concept of a thing in itself should not be reduced, as Allison does, to its "physical" sense: things in themselves can be *both* empirical, material objects, regarded as they are in themselves, *and* purely immaterial entities that cannot, by any means, become objects of an intuition by us. This idea seems to be supported by an already-quoted passage from

²⁶³ De Boer, 2014, p. 242. Cf. Allison, 2004.

²⁶⁴ De Boer, 2014, p. 242, my emphasis.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., my emphasis.

²⁶⁶ Ivi, p. 243.

²⁶⁷ The difference between cognition and thought will be discussed in Section 1.2.4.1.

the section *On the ground of the distinction of all objects in general into phenomena and noumena* as in the second edition, which is worth recalling:

Nevertheless, if we call certain objects, as appearances, beings of sense (*phenomena*), because we distinguish the way in which we intuit them from their constitution in itself, then it already follows from our concept that to these we as it were oppose, as objects thought merely through the understanding, either the same objects [*eben dieselbe*] conceived in accordance with the latter constitution [...], or else *other possible things, which are not objects of our senses at all*, and call these beings of understanding (*noumena*).²⁶⁸

A similar thought seems to be implied in the following statement from *The discipline of pure reason*:

But we also believe ourselves to be able to go beyond our concepts *a priori* and to amplify our cognition. We attempt to do this either through pure understanding, with regard to that which can at least be an *object of experience*, or even through pure reason, with regard to such properties of things, or *even with regard to the existence of such objects, that can never come forth in experience*.²⁶⁹

These passages speak in favor of the idea that both *material* objects (when considered as they are in themselves) and *immaterial* objects (which, instead, can be nothing for us, i.e., cannot meet the conditions of our experience) are things in themselves. By introducing the transcendental distinction between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich*, therefore, Kant might be distinguishing “between two possible approaches to things *as well as* between two kinds of things”²⁷⁰: the first aspect of the distinction applies only to things that can be objects of experience for us (which can be considered in accordance with the transcendental conditions of this experience or in abstraction from the latter); the second aspect, instead, allows Kant to safeguard a further class of entities (additional to the one of empirical objects), which cannot be objects of experience for us, and thus cannot be known. His idea, giving rise to the need for a critique of traditional metaphysics, seems to be that once metaphysics is confident that it can obtain cognition of empirical objects *as they are in themselves* (e.g., cognition of a rose as it is in itself), then nothing

²⁶⁸ B 306, my emphasis, translation modified. Here I depart from the Guyer-Wood translation, since in translates “*eben dieselbe*” as “other objects”.

²⁶⁹ A 764-765 / B 792-793, my emphasis.

²⁷⁰ De Boer, 2014, p. 242.

prevents it from coherently claiming that it can obtain cognition of immaterial things as well (e.g., cognition of the soul or God)²⁷¹: and herein lies precisely the trouble, since “Kant condemns ‘dogmatic’ metaphysicians for claiming to have more synthetic *a priori* knowledge than they actually do”²⁷². Consequently, according to his critical idealism, we cannot cognize neither empirical objects as they are in themselves (but only as appearances), nor purely immaterial entities (that cannot be appearances at all). With regard to the latter, however, there still remains the possibility of thought.

1.2.4.1 Limits of cognition and possibilities of thought

The present examination of transcendental idealism has resulted in the impossibility to cognize things in themselves (regardless of whether they are empirical objects, considered as they are in themselves, or purely intellectual objects). Alongside

²⁷¹ As de Boer’s interpretation points out, Kant does not want, however, to reduce the domain of metaphysics to a systematic treatment of the *a priori* cognition we can obtain within the boundaries of experience (this idea will be developed in more detail in Chapter 2). This is the reason why “he introduces various concepts that correspond to the metaphysical concept of a thing in itself but that, contrary to the latter, do not imply that that to which these terms refer can become an object of knowledge” (de Boer, 2014, p. 243), or, more clearly, do not imply that “things that are considered independently of sensibility amount to objects of cognition” (de Boer, 2020, p. 115). This is valid for both the concept of a “transcendental object” (*transzendentes Objekt*) and for that of a “noumenon” (*Noumenon*). The issue of the relationship between the concepts of *Ding an sich*, *transzendentes Objekt* and *Noumenon* is extremely debated, and cannot be addressed in detail here. For the purposes of this research, I will therefore only provide the coordinates of de Boer’s interpretation of this problem, in order to better understand her position. In her reading, Kant introduces concepts such as that of “noumenon” and “transcendental object” in order to critically dissect the various elements of the concept of a thing, which would otherwise remain too indeterminate, as it happened in former metaphysics; this allows him to distinguish the specific roles that each of these elements acquires in the context of general and special metaphysics respectively (cf. *ivi*, p. 111). As regards the concept of a noumenon: just like the thing in itself, it is “the thinking of something in general, in which I abstract from all form of sensible intuition” (A 252); but unlike the thing in itself, the specific function of the concept of a noumenon consists in marking “the boundaries of our sensible cognition” (A 289 / B 345). By doing so, it prevents “both sensibility and the pure understanding from encroaching on the mere thought of something” (de Boer, 2020, p. 115). In her interpretation, the second edition of the section *On the ground of the distinction of all objects in general into phenomena and noumena* clarifies this point by introducing a distinction between a noumenon in the positive sense (as “an object of a non-sensible intuition”, B 307) and a noumenon in the negative sense (as “a thing insofar as it is not an object of our sensible intuition”, *ibid.*). As regards the concept of a transcendental object, instead, it is interpreted by de Boer as the outcome of the necessity of the transcendental subject to posit a “something = X” (A 250) that can function as the bearer of a number of *a priori* determinations, since without doing so, it would be impossible to establish anything *a priori* about objects. Moreover, Kant intends to distinguish himself from Wolffian metaphysicians by restricting the legitimate function of the transcendental object to the process of unifying sensible representations, meaning that things such as the soul and God simply cannot function as the “something = X” (*ibid.*) (cf. de Boer, 2020, pp. 116-125). For a deeper insight into the problem of the relationship between thing in itself, noumenon and transcendental object, see Allison, 1978, de Boer, 2014, Onof, 2019, Prauss, 1977.

²⁷² Chignell, 2014, p. 579.

this impossibility, however, a further space has come to light: a space, left for now entirely undetermined, for a possibility of thinking that, somehow, extends beyond the slight boundaries of cognition.

As Kant himself clarifies, “to *think* of an object and to *cognize* an object are [...] not the same”²⁷³. More specifically, “for us *thinking* of an object in general through a pure concept of the understanding can become *cognition* only insofar as this concept is related to objects of the senses”²⁷⁴. When drawing the results of the *Transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding*, he concludes that “we cannot *think* any object except through categories; we cannot *cognize* any object that is thought except through intuitions that correspond to those objects”; moreover, he specifies that “the categories are not restricted in *thinking* by the conditions of our sensible intuition, but have an unbounded field, and only the *cognition* of objects that we think, the determination of the object, requires intuition”²⁷⁵. As this passage makes clear, therefore, the distinction between thought and cognition hinges on the problem of the attribution of objective reality (*objektive Realität*) to the pure concepts of the understanding. For a category to possess objective reality means the possibility of exhibiting an object corresponding to it in intuition; in other words, for the pure concept of the understanding to be objectively real, an object corresponding to it “must be able to be given [*gegeben*] in some way” in intuition: “without that the concepts are empty”. “To give an object [...] is nothing other than to relate its representation to experience (whether this be actual or still possible)”: therefore, “the *possibility of experience* is what provides objective reality” to the categories²⁷⁶. Consistent with this, Heidegger, interpreter of the *Transcendental Deduction*, admonishes:

However, in order to understand the problem of the objective reality of the categories as a problem of transcendence, it is necessary that one should not take the Kantian term “reality” [*Realität*] in the sense given it by modern “theory of knowledge”, according to which “reality” signifies something like “actuality” [*Wirklichkeit*], which Kant denoted by the term *Dasein* or “existence” [*Existenz*].²⁷⁷

²⁷³ B 146.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., my emphasis.

²⁷⁵ B 166.

²⁷⁶ For this and previous quotations: A 155-156 / B 194-195.

²⁷⁷ Heidegger, 1962, p. 91, translation modified.

Before properly qualifying what can be a space for thought that goes beyond the limits of theoretical cognition in the strict sense, a further terminological clarification is required. Following Marcus Willaschek and Eric Watkins’s remarks²⁷⁸, it is indeed necessary to draw a preliminary difference between *cognition* and *knowledge*. This elucidation is imperative because of the confusion that sometimes arises within the English translation: the German term “*Erkenntnis*” corresponds more precisely to “(theoretical) cognition”, whereas the term “knowledge” is a more exact translation for the German “*Wissen*”; identifying *Erkenntnis* and *Wissen* might lead to misunderstandings of important claims of the *KrV*. Willaschek and Watkins provide a basic definition of theoretical cognition in terms of “a mental state through which we are aware of the existence and (some of the) general features of objects”; knowledge, instead, is a kind of assent, i.e., it is an epistemic attitude from a subject which requires epistemic justification, but does not demand “the existence of an object of knowledge nor the attribution of general features to it”²⁷⁹. Whereas the use of the term *Erkenntnis* is prevalent throughout most of the *KrV*²⁸⁰, only in the *Canon of Pure Reason* Kant provides the coordinates of his conception of *Wissen*: he discusses it as one of the modes (together with *Glauben* and *Meinen*) of “holding to be true [*Fürwahrhalten*]”²⁸¹, a form of assent involving “both an attitude towards a judgment and an assessment of the grounds, or reasons, that would support that attitude”. The peculiarity of knowledge, distinguishing it from other kinds of assent, is its requirement of objectively sufficient grounds and an epistemic justification that guarantees truth: knowledge is therefore “warranted true belief”²⁸². As a result of this characterization, while cognition requires that its object be given to us in intuition, knowledge does not carry this kind of restriction: coherently, “it seems in principle possible for Kant to allow for knowledge of objects of which we cannot have cognition”²⁸³. More specifically, he “denies that we can have any *substantive* knowledge of *specific* things in themselves”, because “such knowledge claims would be

²⁷⁸ Cf. Willaschek & Watkins, 2020.

²⁷⁹ Ivi, pp. 3196-3197.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Chignell, 2014, p. 576.

²⁸¹ I will discuss in more detail the concept of *Fürwahrhalten* in Chapter 3.

²⁸² For this and the previous quotation: Willaschek & Watkins, 2020, pp. 3206-3208.

²⁸³ Ivi, p. 3209. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy how cognition can contribute to knowledge, in the sense that it “can contribute to the justification required for knowledge without itself being an instance of knowledge”: in other words, cognition can provide “the kind of objective justification that is required for knowledge”. It seems that at least “all justification of *empirical* knowledge must [...] involve cognition of empirical objects” (ivi, p. 3210).

lacking in their objective justification”²⁸⁴. At the same time, however, “he can allow that we have *some* knowledge of things in themselves”, since, as Andrew Chignell points out, the objectively sufficient grounds for that knowledge would be come from something different from theoretical cognition²⁸⁵. Examples include: “the negative assent that *the things-in-themselves are not in space and time* and the positive but very general assent that *some things-in-themselves exists and grounds appearances*”²⁸⁶.

However, Chignell’s position on cognition and knowledge (and, therefore, also on possibilities of thought) is not entirely consonant with that of Willaschek and Watkins. First of all, an effective account of cognition must necessarily involve a clarification of what it means for an object to be “given” (*gegeben*): Willaschek and Watkins tie givenness very closely to intuition, with the result of threatening to leave unobserved and unobservable objects outside the domain of cognition²⁸⁷. Chignell’s proposal consists, instead, in interpreting givenness in light of the Kantian notion of “real possibility”, as suggested by Kant himself in the following passage:

To *cognize* an object, it is required that I be able to prove its possibility [...]. But I can *think* whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself, i.e., as long as my concept is a possible thought, even if I cannot give any assurance whether or not there is a corresponding object somewhere within the sum total of all possibilities. But in order to ascribe objective validity to such a concept (real possibility, for the first sort of possibility was merely logical) something more is required.²⁸⁸

Relevant for an account of cognition is therefore not much the givenness condition itself (i.e., the ability of a corresponding object to be given in intuition), but rather a modal condition on cognition, implying the notion of real possibility: the modal condition is thus the most fundamental one for cognition, while givenness is relevant only derivatively,

²⁸⁴ Ivi, p. 3211.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Chignell, 2014, p. 577. Examples of this grounds would be the “arguments establishing that space and time are *merely* the forms of our receptive sensible intuition” and “the inference that there must be some non-spatio-temporal thing that is responsible for the ‘matter’ of this intuition” (ibid.); see B xxvi.

²⁸⁶ Chignell, 2014, p. 577.

²⁸⁷ Cf. Chignell, 2017, p. 139. For example, “the ‘magnetic matter’ that moves iron filings around, or the galaxies we postulate on the basis of astronomical observation” could not count as given in Willaschek and Watkins’s account: therefore, they could not be objects of knowledge.

²⁸⁸ B xxvi.

since “showing that an object can be intuited [...] is typically the only way we have of proving its real possibility”²⁸⁹.

This quoted passage, however, together with the concept of real possibility, is of great significance also for an account of the distinction between the limits of cognition and the boundaries of thought, that is being discussed here. As already in some pre-critical works briefly presented above²⁹⁰, for Kant the limits of the broader space of thought are determined by the notion of logical possibility: and in turn, the latter is shaped by the principle of contradiction, as “the universal and completely sufficient *principle of all analytic cognition*”²⁹¹. The narrower borders of cognition, on the other hand, are determined by the notion of real possibility: and in turn, the latter “rests on principles of possible experience”²⁹², since, as mentioned above, the correspondent object must be able to be given within an experience possible for us. That which falls outside the limits of cognition, therefore, is the so-called *ens rationis*, i.e., “nothing, as empty concept without object [*Nichts, als leerer Begriff ohne Gegenstand*]”: it “cannot be counted among the possibilities” although it “must not on that ground be asserted to be impossible”. Conversely, that which falls outside the broader limits of thought is a *nihil negativum*, i.e., “nothing, as empty object without concept [*Nichts, als leerer Gegenstand ohne Begriff*]”: this is “opposed to possibility”, because its concept “is nothing, the impossible”²⁹³.

The results of this brief analysis show that the domain within which we can have cognition (*Erkenntnis*) is narrower than the domain within which we can have knowledge (*Wissen*); this, in turn, is comprised within the wider possibilities of thinking (*denken*). For the purposes of the present research, this implies that: with respect to *specific* things in themselves, we certainly cannot have cognition; however, with respect to things in themselves *in general*, i.e., “taken together”²⁹⁴, collectively considered, we can at least have some kind of knowledge, as described above; and furthermore, at best with respect to *some* things in themselves, we can somehow go a little further by thinking of them²⁹⁵.

²⁸⁹ Ivi, p. 141. This is confirmed, e.g., when Kant states that as far as the real possibility of a concept is concerned, the issue is “whether it relates to an object and therefore signifies anything” (B 302-303).

²⁹⁰ Cf. *supra*, Section 1.1.2.

²⁹¹ A 151 / B 191.

²⁹² A 596 / B 624.

²⁹³ For this and previous quotations: A 290-292 / B 347-349.

²⁹⁴ Chignell, 2014, p. 584.

²⁹⁵ The modality of this possibility will be discussed in more detail in Section 2.3.2.

This epistemological premise is crucial to understand what the destiny of metaphysics might be on the basis of the novel background of transcendental idealism.

Chapter 2

The Critique of Pure Reason and the Possibilities of Metaphysics

[...] and this court is none other than the *critique of pure reason* itself. Yet by this I do not understand a critique of books and systems, but a critique of the faculty of reason in general, and in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive *independently of all experience*, and hence the decision about the possibility or impossibility of a metaphysics in general, and the determination of its sources, as well as its extent and boundaries, all, however, from principles.¹

Transcendental philosophy, i.e., the doctrine of the possibility of all *a priori* knowledge as such, which is that critique of pure reason whose elements have now been completely set forth, *has as its purpose the founding of a metaphysics*, whose purpose in turn envisages as an aim of pure reason the extension of the latter from the limits of the sensible to the field of the super-sensible; a transit which, if it is not to be a dangerous lap, seeing that it is not, after all, a continuous progression in the same order of principles, makes necessary a scrupulous attention to the bounds of both domains, which obstructs progress.²

A faithful interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism has proved to be essential to the overall aim of understanding his critical conception of metaphysics and the destiny that he envisions for it, according to the fundamental premises he established. Nonetheless, one step forward must now be taken: as briefly hinted at in the previous chapter, in fact, transcendental idealism is the ground on which Kant settles his critical approach to the question as to the determination of "the possibility or impossibility of a metaphysics in general", as well as the recognition of its "sources" and the delimitation of its "extent" and "boundaries"³.

The present chapter will therefore be dedicated to illustrating Kant's aim, achieved through the *KrV*, to bring metaphysics "upon the secure course of a science"⁴; the fundamental purpose will consist in highlighting the positive, constructing side of the work, in which Kant collects the results of his protracted effort to operate a reform of metaphysics. More specifically, it will be shown how his projected transformation in metaphysics is directed both towards *metaphysica generalis*, i.e., ontology – which is

¹ A xii.

² AA 20:272-273.

³ A xii.

⁴ B xiv.

prescribed to stick to an exposition of the concepts and the a priori principles which are constitutive of every cognition of objects – and *metaphysica specialis*, i.e., the part of metaphysics dealing with the soul, the world as a whole and God – which can continue its research to the extent that it abandons its tendency to consider its contents as objects of cognition and recognizes the boundaries of reason. In full accordance with the results of the previous chapter, special attention will be paid to the fact that Kant does not wish to limit the scope of metaphysics to a purely intellectual consideration of objects we encounter in experience; on the contrary, he acknowledges the validity of a research also about entities which cannot in any way be manifest as appearances. The possibility of a regulative use of reason’s ideas in this field (due to the impossibility of their constitutive use) will be explored, the latter opening new and promising possibilities to metaphysics itself.

2.1 The *Critique*’s positive strand: a reform of metaphysics

A central tenet of the present work lies in the attempt to show that one of Kant’s fundamental aims in the *KrV* was not only to critically debunk metaphysics, but also, and more importantly, to provide a reform of metaphysics in order for it to become a science and to serve the supreme ends of mankind. Accordingly, in relation to the problem of metaphysics, his project in the *KrV* does not merely consist in a *pars destruens*, aiming at submitting to criticism the mistakes of traditional metaphysics, but also and above all in a worthy *pars construens*, in which Kant collects the results of his decade-long efforts to impress a radical change in this discipline. This positive strand of the *KrV*, however, has frequently been neglected in the scholarship: the tendency to interpret its fundamental purpose as intended to leave metaphysics behind, and consequently to “marginalize or ignore”⁵ Kant’s projected renovation of metaphysics, in fact, has been prevailing in Kant’s analytic scholarship for a long time, and is rooted in the highly influential account of the *KrV* provided by neo-Kantianism⁶. According to the latter, in fact, the first *Critique*

⁵ De Boer, 2020, p. 6.

⁶ Frederick C. Beiser defines neo-Kantianism as “the movement in 19th century Germany to rehabilitate Kant’s philosophy”, resulting in being “the predominant philosophical movement in Germany in the final decades of the 19th century” and spreading its influence to Italy, France, England and Russia. Beiser identifies its golden age in the period of time that goes from 1860 and 1914. Three main groups made up

is mainly concerned with establishing a theory of possible experience, through an inquiry into the conditions of possibility of empirical knowledge, resulting in an “investigation of the basic principles of the mathematical natural sciences”⁷; this trend has, in turn, led to the tendency to consider metaphysics as a merely marginal and collateral issue in Kant’s *KrV*. Challenging this reading, the present work aims at interpreting the *KrV* as an inquiry essentially concerned with the problem of metaphysics.

In fact, the often-popular assumption that reads Kant as a denier or a destroyer of metaphysics appears as ungrounded as soon as one undertakes a deeper reading of his work as a whole and does not arrest at the surface. This assumption, indeed, is very dangerous for its outcome on the overall picture of Kant’s philosophy as a whole: as Georg Sans rightly points out, “to present Kant mainly as a disruptor of metaphysics would mean to dismiss the importance of the *Critique of Practical Reason* and of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*”⁸. As seen in the previous chapter, indeed, the aim of freeing metaphysics from dogmatism by submitting it to criticism was motivated by the more fundamental aim of serving the supreme ends of mankind. In the later *Über die Fortschritte der Metaphysik*, Kant defines metaphysics as “the science of progressing by reason from knowledge of the sensible to that of the super-sensible”⁹. Moreover, in the *Architectonic of Pure Reason*, Kant characterizes this discipline as “the culmination of all *culture* of human reason”; it is “indispensable” and it shows “dignity and authority”: and “because essential ends are at issue here”, reason “must work without respite wither for sound insight or for the destruction of good insights that are already to hand”.

From the whole course of our critique we will have been sufficiently convinced that even though metaphysics cannot be the foundation of religion, yet it must always remain its bulwark, and that human

this philosophical orientation: the Marburg school, whose protagonists were Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp and Ernst Cassirer; the Baden (or Heidelberg) school, whose main representatives were Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert and Emil Lask; and the neo-Friesian school led by Leonard Nelson (Beiser, 2014, pp. 1-2). Under this name, therefore, many different lines of interpretation are comprised; however, all of them share the fundamental intent of carrying out “a return to the spirit of Kant’s teachings”, in particular the dualism between understanding and sensibility, “the limitation of all knowledge to experience”, “the leading role of a critical and analytical method in philosophy”, and “the need for philosophy to follow rather than lead the natural sciences” (ivi, p. 3).

⁷ De Boer & Howard, 2019, p. 361. See also Heidegger, 1991, XVIII, pp. 274-275. Heidegger understands by neo-Kantianism “the conception of the critique of pure reason that explains the part of pure reason that leads up to the transcendental dialectic as a theory of knowledge in relation to natural science” (ibid., my translation).

⁸ Sans, 2013, p. 23, my translation.

⁹ AA 20:260.

reason [...] could never dispense with such a science, which reins it in and, by means of a scientific and fully illuminating self-knowledge, prevents the devastations that a lawless speculative reason would otherwise inevitably perpetrate in both morality and religion. [...] We can therefore be sure that [...] we will always return to metaphysics as to a beloved from whom we have been estranged [...].¹⁰

The great importance Kant attributes to metaphysics speaks with clarity in favor of the centrality of the question as to its scopes and limits in the overall picture of the *KrV*, and against the marginality of this problem. In this sense, Heidegger's interpretation in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, marking a "metaphysical turn" in the history of the reception of Kant after neo-Kantianism, is radical: the *KrV* is "a laying of the foundation [*Grundlegung*] of metaphysics", consisting in tracing the "architectonic limits" and in distinguishing its "intrinsic possibility", i.e., "the concrete determination of its essence"¹¹. Since metaphysics belongs to the nature of human being as a "natural disposition [*Naturanlage*]"¹², it has always already assumed a certain configuration; but the constant failure of all its attempts forces this discipline to suspend its activities in order to build a more solid foundation on which to operate. The critical task, in fact, is precisely aimed at providing metaphysics with a ground, at laying its foundation, i.e., "the projection [*Entwerfen*] of the building plan itself in such a way as to indicate on what and how the structure will be grounded"¹³. Why does the foundation of metaphysics by Kant take the shape of a critique of pure reason? In this respect, Heidegger's account is insightful: providing metaphysics in totality with a grounding is "to reveal [*Enthüllung*] the intrinsic possibility of ontology"¹⁴. The problem of founding *metaphysica specialis*, dealing with matters of higher interest for human reason (Kant calls it "true metaphysics" and metaphysics in its "ultimate purpose"¹⁵), is thrown back upon the problem of founding *metaphysica generalis*, i.e., ontology, because, in Heidegger's wording, only

¹⁰ For this and previous quotations: A 849-851 / B 877-879.

¹¹ Heidegger, 1962, pp. 2-4. Heidegger later specifies his opposition to the neo-Kantian paradigm as follows: "The purpose of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is completely misunderstood, therefore, if this work is interpreted as a 'theory of experience' or perhaps as a theory of the positive sciences. The *Critique of Pure Reason* has nothing to do with a 'theory of knowledge'" (ivi, p. 21). See also Heidegger, 1991, XVIII, pp. 274-275.

¹² B 21- 22. See also AA 04:365.

¹³ Heidegger, 1962, p. 4.

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 17, translation modified.

¹⁵ AA 20:260. In *Über die Fortschritte der Metaphysik*, Kant claims that the end metaphysics has in view is "great, perhaps the greatest, indeed the one and only purpose which reason can ever look to in its speculation, since all men are more or less engaged in it" (AA 20:259). See also AA 20:262, where Kant clearly states that "the aim of reason" in metaphysics is directed to "the super-sensible".

ontological knowledge (“the precursory comprehension of the constitution of the Being of the essent”) can explain the possibility of a “comportment [*Verhalten*]” to the essent in general; a comportment, in which “the essent reveals itself in itself [*sich dieses an ihm selbst zeigt*]”. In a word, “*metaphysica generalis* provides the necessary ‘preparation’ to *metaphysica specialis*”¹⁶. In turn, the problem of the possibility of ontology is traced back by Kant to the pivotal question: “how are synthetic *a priori* judgements possible?”¹⁷. This happens for two reasons: in the first place, a knowledge that “reveals the essent itself”¹⁸ is called synthetic; secondly, this knowledge is brought forth *a priori*, i.e., independently of any experience of the essent. Since “pure reason is that which contains the principles for cognizing something absolutely *a priori*”¹⁹, “the revelation of the possibility of ontological knowledge must become an elucidation of the essence of pure reason”; therefore, “the laying of the foundation of metaphysics as the revelation of the essence of ontology is a *Critique of Pure Reason*”²⁰.

In her recent book *Kant’s Reform of Metaphysics*, Karin de Boer puts forward the proposal, inspired by the Heideggerian interpretation but devoid of its peculiar terminology, to read the *KrV* “as a work concerned with the inner possibility, ground, or foundation of metaphysics rather than with a thoroughgoing critique of its premises”²¹; in a word, her main insight is that Kant “seeks to reform rather than abolish” traditional metaphysics²². According to this idea, the *KrV* is not much concerned with the conditions of possibility of experience (as neo-Kantianism considers); or, at least, the account of these conditions of possibility is not an end in itself, but rather a means in order to deal

¹⁶ For this and previous quotations: Heidegger, 1962, pp. 15-16. Ontology, however, as Heidegger remarks, is not an end in itself, nor is its primary aim a foundation of the positive sciences, but rather finds “its necessity and its role” in the “higher interest” that reason finds in itself when it is engaged in *metaphysica specialis* (ibid.). On this topic, see also AA 20:259 and AA 20:272-273 (already quoted), where this idea seems to find strong textual support: “transcendental philosophy, i.e., the doctrine of the possibility of all *a priori* knowledge as such, which is that critique of pure reason whose elements have now been completely set forth, has as its purpose the founding of a metaphysics, whose purpose in turn envisages as an aim of pure reason the extension of the latter from the limits of the sensible to the field of the super-sensible”. Karin de Boer agrees that the account of the conditions of possibility of experience provided by Kant in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* and in the *Transcendental Analytic* is “not so much an end in itself as a means to get clear on the conditions under which metaphysics can be ‘brought on the secure path of a science’”; obviously, as she remarks, she does not deny that that account is provided (de Boer, 2020, p. 3).

¹⁷ B 19. See also AA 04:275-276.

¹⁸ Heidegger, 1962, p. 18.

¹⁹ A 11 / B 24.

²⁰ Heidegger, 1962, p. 19.

²¹ De Boer, 2020, p. 10.

²² Ivi, p. 1.

with the conditions of possibility of metaphysics. De Boer's interpretation recognizes in Kant the purpose of paving the way for a reform of both *metaphysica generalis*, resulting in transcendental philosophy, and *metaphysica specialis*, thereby becoming a purely intellectual discipline²³. The gains of such a "purified" metaphysics "would extend beyond the sphere of theoretical cognition", allowing to "ward off attacks stemming from skepticism, determinism, and materialism and so to put itself in the service of the moral ends of mankind"²⁴. The focus on the *KrV*, however, is rather "meta-metaphysical", with the aim of preparing the ground for a scientific metaphysics²⁵: accordingly, as de Boer emphasizes, the work is presented by Kant as a "propaedeutic"²⁶, intended to put metaphysics on "the secure path of a science"²⁷. This preparatory work would protect morality and religion from the "devastations that a lawless speculative reason would otherwise inevitably perpetrate"²⁸.

Also Marcus Willaschek's reading in *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics* provides support to this view, confirming that Kant's "overarching concern in the first *Critique* is not with science, mathematics, or possible experience, but rather with the possibility of *metaphysics*", once again against the neo-Kantian approach whose tendency was to emphasize the "constructive" results of the *Transcendental Aesthetic* and the *Transcendental Analytic* at the cost of neglecting and disregarding Kant's metaphysical interest. As Willaschek rightly underlines, the *KrV* seems to be a "metaphysics of metaphysics"²⁹, i.e., "a metaphysical theory about the possibility of metaphysics" which is made necessary by the unpleasant state of former traditional metaphysics³⁰. Without critique, i.e., merely as a natural predisposition, the latter "necessarily ends in fallacies

²³ Cf. *ivi*, pp. 14, 45, 65, 190.

²⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 60–61. See also: Section 1.1.1 of the present work; Kant's already-mentioned letter to Herz (AA 10:144); B xxix–xxxi, B xxxiv, A 849–851 / B 877–879.

²⁵ De Boer, 2020, pp. 9, 192, 212. De Boer's analysis of Kant's lectures on metaphysics between 1762 and 1792, presented in a critical guide to the lectures edited by Courtney D. Fugate, seems to confirm that Kant was led to write the *KrV* not because of a concern with the conditions and limits of human knowledge as such, but in order to identify the conditions and limits of the synthetic a priori cognition pursued in metaphysics; the lecture transcripts show, more clearly than the published work, how the idea of transcendental philosophy emerged from Kant's effort to determine what was worthwhile and worthless in former Wolffian metaphysics, and to turn it into a science. The lectures support the view that Kant's criticism of Wolffian metaphysics, although it became more radical over time, never took the form of a radical departure (cf. de Boer, 2018, pp. 31–52).

²⁶ A 11 / B 25, A 841 / B 869, A 850 / B 878.

²⁷ B ix, B xiii.

²⁸ A 849 / B 877.

²⁹ This expression is employed by Kant himself in a letter to Marcus Herz of May 1781 (AA 10:269).

³⁰ For this and previous quotations: Willaschek, 2018, pp. 36–37.

and contradictions”; metaphysics as a science “is possible *only* on the basis of a critique of pure reason”, which achieves two crucial results that are fundamental for the question at stake: the discursivity thesis (i.e., the thesis that cognition requires both intuitions and concepts)³¹ and the transcendental distinction between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich*. Combining these two claims, the outcome is the possibility of metaphysics as a science as long as it concerns the “conditions of the possibility of experience”³².

After displaying the centrality of metaphysics and of the project of its transformation in the overall picture of the *KrV*, some textual support for this view will be considered: for this aim, the crucial passages where Kant presents his work as a “propaedeutic”, intended to finally put metaphysics on the “secure course of a science”, will be addressed.

2.1.1 A “propaedeutic” towards the “secure course of a science”

As is well known, Kant commences the *Preface* to his *Critique* by depicting the state of conflict in which reason finds itself when it is engaged (as its very nature prescribes) in metaphysics, i.e., when the “principles on which it is proceeding”, in climbing higher and higher towards “more remote conditions”, “surpass the bounds of all experience” and therefore “no longer recognize any touchstone [*Probierstein*]”³³. To reconcile the “battlefield” of the endless controversies that arise, and to introduce a “transformation and enlightenment” in metaphysics, Kant demands that “reason should take on anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge”³⁴. Thanks to this “preparatory activity”, consisting in the “antecedent critique” carried out by reason with respect to “its own capacity”, the “advancement of metaphysics as a well-grounded science” is finally made possible³⁵.

³¹ Cf. A 51 / B 75.

³² A 158 / B 197. Willaschek’s position is that “transcendent metaphysics” (i.e., *special metaphysics*, concerned with the soul, the world as a whole and God) cannot be developed into a science, since it “would have to consist in a priori claims about non-sensible objects – objects that cannot be given in human intuition”, on the basis of A 642 / B 670. However, he admits that “something analogous to a science is possible even here”, in the form of “belief or rational faith” (Willaschek, 2018, pp. 43-44). The topic of the possibility, in Kant, of *metaphysica specialis* will be discussed in more detail in Section 2.3; the topic of *Glaube* will be discussed in Chapter 3.

³³ A vii-viii.

³⁴ A viii-xii.

³⁵ B xxxv-xxxvi.

The necessity of a “propaedeutic science” that would precede metaphysics was already unequivocal for Kant by the time of the *Inaugural Dissertation*: the latter was conceived by him precisely as a “specimen” of that science³⁶, aiming at introducing a “critical, second-order investigation into the conditions under which a rigorous metaphysics is possible”³⁷. This task, however, is only fully taken over by the subsequent *KrV*:

Now the philosophy of pure reason is either *propaedeutic* [*Propädeutik*] (preparation [*Vorübung*]), which investigates the faculty of reason in regard to all pure *a priori* cognition, and is called *critique*, or, second, the system of pure reason (science), the whole (true as well as apparent) philosophical cognition from pure reason in systematic interconnection, and is called *metaphysics*; this name can also be given to all of pure philosophy including the critique, in order to comprehend the investigation of everything that can ever be cognized *a priori* as well as the presentation of that which constitutes a system of pure philosophical cognitions of this kind, but in distinction from all empirical as well as mathematical use of reason.³⁸

In accordance with this passage, located in the *Architectonic of Pure Reason*, a critique of pure reason has the function of being a preparatory work, exploring the possibility for pure reason of a priori knowledge, to a subsequent metaphysics as a “system of pure reason”, i.e., the totality of everything that can be known a priori³⁹. In the words of de Boer, in the *KrV* “metaphysics is called upon to interrupt its usual activity in order to reflect on the nature of its ultimate premises, and, hence, to obtain knowledge of its proper capacity to obtain knowledge”⁴⁰. According to her interpretation, the *KrV* imposes two requirements to a reformed, scientific metaphysics: first, it must (and can) be completely independent from (pure) sensibility⁴¹; second (and consequently), it must acknowledge that purely intellectual judgments do not amount to cognitions of objects. Therefore, “by expelling sensibility from its domain, as it has to, metaphysics *at once*

³⁶ AA 02:395.

³⁷ De Boer, 2020, p. 53. De Boer reads the *Inaugural Dissertation* as providing an example of “how metaphysics might be turned into a science”, applied to Wolffian general cosmology (ibid.). In the earlier *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* something analogous is showed through the example of rational psychology; already in 1766 Kant spoke of the importance for metaphysics to “pass judgment on its own procedure” in order to establish itself as “science of the boundaries of human reason” (AA 02:368-370).

³⁸ A 841 / B 869.

³⁹ The topic of Kant’s projected metaphysical system will be addressed in Section 2.1.2.

⁴⁰ De Boer, 2020, p. 66.

⁴¹ In this respect, the program of the *KrV* seems to be perfectly coherent with that of the *Inaugural Dissertation*.

expels itself from the domain within which theoretical cognitions of objects can be obtained”⁴².

In several other places throughout the *KrV*, Kant refers to the work in question as a “propaedeutic” to “the future execution to the system”⁴³. In this respect, great clarity about the aim to be fulfilled by a critique of pure reason can be grasped by the following passage from the *Introduction*:

Now from all of this there results the idea of a special science, which can be called the *critique of pure reason*. For reason is the faculty that provides principles of cognition *a priori*. Hence pure reason is that which contains the principles for cognizing something absolutely *a priori*. An *organon* of pure reason would be a sum total of all those principles in accordance with which all pure *a priori* cognitions can be acquired and actually brought about. The exhaustive application of such an organon would create a system of pure reason. But since that requires a lot, and it is still an open question whether such an amplification of our knowledge is possible at all and in what cases it would be possible, we can regard a science of the mere estimation [*Beurteilung*] of pure reason, of its sources [*Quellen*] and boundaries [*Grenzen*], as the *propaedeutic* to the system of pure reason. Such a thing would not be a *doctrine*, but must be called only a *critique* of pure reason [...].⁴⁴

A critique of pure reason is therefore its “mere estimation” of “its sources and boundaries” as a precondition for the subsequent elaboration of a “system of pure reason”: the critique is a “special science”, establishing and explaining the principles of pure cognition *a priori*, but it is not for this reason a “doctrine”. Once again in the *Architectonic*, Kant claims that what “we can call philosophy in a genuine sense” is the metaphysics of nature as well as morals (both part of his projected system of pure reason), “but above all the *preparatory* (propaedeutic) critique of reason that dares to fly with its own wings”⁴⁵. Its indispensable role was necessary first “to display the sources and conditions” of the possibility of metaphysics and “to clear and level a ground that was completely overgrown”⁴⁶, i.e., that on which traditional metaphysics, including the Leibniz-Wolffian metaphysical systems he mainly adopted as a reference, was founded.

⁴² De Boer, 2020, pp. 64, 68-70. The possible epistemic status of the outcome of such purely intellectual activity will be discussed in Chapter 3.

⁴³ B xliii.

⁴⁴ A 11 / B 24-25. When introducing the *Transcendental Logic*, Kant confirms that this practice is common “in the schools”: the “organon of this or that science” is “often stuck before the sciences as their propaedeutic” (A 52 / B 76).

⁴⁵ A 850 / B 878.

⁴⁶ A xxi.

Through the *KrV*, therefore, Kant is finally completing his decade-long effort to amend the perilous condition of metaphysics and to allow this discipline “to enter upon the secure course of a science”⁴⁷: this achievement is made possible by the new theoretical grounds reached through his critical turn and provided by transcendental idealism. Kant’s depiction of his own work in the second *Preface* is even clearer on the role of critique in enabling metaphysics to acquire a scientific status: after recalling the path through which other disciplines, such as logic, mathematics and natural science, achieved a scientific status, once again he describes, by contrast, the unfortunate present fate of metaphysics, whose procedure seems rather “a mere groping” than a genuine progress in knowledge. He is confident, however, that such a path can be reached for this discipline too, since it cannot be that reason “betrays us” by afflicting us with unsolvable questions regarding matters of the greatest interest for itself, making up “one of the most important parts of our desire for knowledge”⁴⁸. As is well known, in order to solve this puzzle, he immediately introduces the idea of a *Kopernikanische Wende*⁴⁹ in the method of philosophy, promising that thus metaphysics would achieve “the secure course of a science”⁵⁰, just as other disciplines had already done.

Differently from the latter, moreover, metaphysics has a peculiar chance:

But then metaphysics also has the rare good fortune, enjoyed by no other rational science that has to do with objects [...], which is that if by this critique it has been brought onto the secure course of a science, then it can fully embrace the entire field of cognitions belonging to it and thus can complete its work and lay it down for posterity as a principal framework that can never be enlarged, since it has to do solely with principles and the limitations on their use, which are determined by the principles themselves. Hence as a fundamental science, metaphysics is also bound to achieve this completeness [...].⁵¹

As Kant had already announced in the first *Preface*, after the critique, for the elaboration of a metaphysical system nothing else is required than to draw up an “*inventory* of all we possess through *pure reason*, ordered systematically”: this body of cognitions would have had been “not half so extensive”, but “incomparably richer in

⁴⁷ B xiv.

⁴⁸ B xiv-xv.

⁴⁹ On this topic, see Section 1.1.

⁵⁰ B xviii.

⁵¹ B xxiii-xxiv.

content than this critique”⁵². With reference to this projected system, the *KrV* is “a treatise on the method, not a system of the science itself; but it catalogs the entire outline of the science of metaphysics, both in respect of its boundaries and in respect of its entire internal structure”⁵³. In a word: “criticism is the preparatory activity necessary for the advancement of metaphysics as a well-grounded science”⁵⁴.

The centrality of the intention of bringing metaphysics on the path of a science for Kant’s overall project seems to be confirmed also in the subsequent *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*: the title itself brings strong support to the idea that the critical task Kant had envisioned was directed towards a scientific, comprehensive system of metaphysics, which would have been, in turn, geared to a higher interest of reason.

Nevertheless I venture to predict that the reader of these prolegomena who thinks for himself will not only come to doubt his previous science, but subsequently will be fully convinced that there can be no such science unless the requirements expressed here, on which its possibility rests, are met, and, as this has never yet been done, that there is as yet no metaphysics at all. Since, however, the demand for it can never be exhausted, because the interest of human reason in general is much too intimately interwoven with it, the reader will admit that a complete reform or rather a rebirth of metaphysics, according to a plan completely unknown before now, is inevitably approaching, however much it may be resisted in the meantime.⁵⁵

Conceived by the author as a condensed version or a “general synopsis”⁵⁶ of the *KrV* and appearing two years after the publication of its first edition, the *Prolegomena* are entirely dedicated to presenting the critical task that Kant carried out from the standpoint of its end: as read above, “a complete reform [*eine völlige Reform*] or rather a rebirth [*eine neue Geburt*] of metaphysics”⁵⁷, in order for it to become a system.

However: where to find this system of a scientific metaphysics for which the *KrV* paves the way, and which Kant announces in his work and also reconfirms in 1787? It seems that, after the publication of the first edition of the *KrV*, Kant prioritized other

⁵² A xx-xxi.

⁵³ B xxii-xxiii.

⁵⁴ B xxxvi.

⁵⁵ AA 04:256-257.

⁵⁶ AA 04:380.

⁵⁷ AA 04:257.

projects (possibly due to a shift of attention towards the practical domain, or to various external circumstances) and the elaboration of metaphysics in its “dogmatic” part was not carried out; for this reason, the intention, clearly expressed by him, to carry out this plan was “largely ignored, misinterpreted, or considered to provide too little guidance”⁵⁸. As a result, Karl Ameriks notices, “it is still very unclear what Kant had in mind by the demand for a system”⁵⁹. To begin with, it must be observed that Kant probably considered the elaboration of such a system, after the propaedeutic critique, a task that was not particularly challenging (as long as its theoretical part was concerned): according to de Boer’s attempted reconstruction of the system, its structure would have resembled Baumgarten’s *Metaphysics* (which Kant used and followed as the textbook for his teachings of metaphysics), but with some noteworthy differences that can be deduced from the outcomes of the *KrV*. The *Doctrine of Method* itself is crucial to grasp the plan that Kant had envisioned by 1781: in particular, the *Architectonic of Pure Reason*, as “the art of systems”, specifies the conditions under which alone the cognitions of our reason can constitute a “system [*System*]” rather than a “mere aggregate [*bloßes Aggregat*]”, i.e., the conditions under which they can attain systematic unity and acquire a scientific status. In turn, this purpose is conditional on the wish to “support and advance” the essential ends of reason. A system is defined as “the unity of the manifold cognitions under one idea”: it thus “contains the end and the form of the whole that is congruent with it”. For the execution of the system, a *schema* of the idea, i.e., “an essential manifoldness and order of the parts determined *a priori* from the principle of the end”, is needed: through the role of the schema, the architectonic unity of a system can arise, “for the sake of its affinity and its derivation from a single supreme and inner end”⁶⁰. These conditions must be applied in the building of a system of philosophical knowledge, and, more specifically, also in the elaboration of its metaphysical section. As explained in the passage quoted above, *metaphysics* (as distinguished from *critique*) is “the system of pure reason (science), the whole [...] philosophical cognition from pure reason in systematic interconnection”; but this name can be also given “to all pure philosophy including the critique”, to encompass “everything that can ever be cognized *a priori*”. What is “customarily” called metaphysics “*in the narrower sense*”, however, is metaphysics of

⁵⁸ De Boer, 2020, p. 213.

⁵⁹ Ameriks, 2001, p. 73.

⁶⁰ For this and previous quotations: A 832-833 / B 860-861.

speculative reason (or metaphysics of nature, as distinct from metaphysics of morals): it “contains all theoretical principles from mere concepts [...] for the theoretical cognition of things”⁶¹. In turn, this metaphysics consists in *transcendental philosophy*, which considers “only the *understanding* and reason itself [...] without assuming objects that *would be given (Ontologia)*”, and in *physiology of pure reason*, concerning “nature, i.e., the sum total of given objects (whether they are given by the senses or, if one will, by another kind of intuition)”⁶². It is noteworthy that the project laid out in the *Architectonic* seems to abstract “from the question as to whether the concepts at hand are used to obtain knowledge of objects” or not, since Kant is not concerned here with the “objectifying act carried out by the pure understanding”⁶³.

According to the brief account of Kant’s projected system of pure reason provided here, it seems that the preparatory work carried out by the *KrV* is much more significant than what the label of mere “propaedeutic” would describe: if such preliminary work is needed not only for metaphysics to acquire a scientific status (which, as seen above, is not an end in itself) but also and mostly for it to be capable of serving the higher ends of reason, it must contain (and, in fact, it does) much more than a mere introduction or preparatory instruction to the system. The role of the *KrV* in this regard seems to be too radical and weighty to be simply depicted in these terms.

2.1.2 The *Critique* as a “doctrine of method” of metaphysics

In line with the need of a broader account of the contribution to the “system of pure reason” Kant envisioned provided by the *KrV*, Gabriele Gava’s interpretative

⁶¹ For this and previous quotations: A 841-842 / B 869-870.

⁶² A 845 / B 873. Transcendental philosophy as the outcome of the Kantian reform of *metaphysica generalis* will be discussed in Section 2.2.1; it is worth mentioning here that the fact that the *KrV* already realizes a part (transcendental philosophy) of the metaphysical system for which it is preparatory does not create problems to this reading of the role of the *KrV* itself: as Gabriele Gava proposes, “the *Critique* makes use of one part of metaphysics, namely transcendental philosophy, to show that the whole of metaphysics can achieve architectonic unity. In this sense, it can both rest on certain doctrinal parts of metaphysics and be a propaedeutic to establishing the complete system as a science” (Gava, 2023, p. 61). As to physiology of pure reason, it is furtherly divided by Kant into four parts: rational physics, rational psychology, rational cosmology and rational theology. As de Boer clarifies, this subdivision is not overlapping with the structure of the *Transcendental Dialectic* because Kant is here disentangling the previous Wolffian general cosmology into rational physics and rational cosmology (cf. de Boer, 2020, p. 219).

⁶³ Ivi, p. 219. This observation is crucial for the possibility of a reformed *metaphysica specialis*, which will be discussed in Section 2.3.

proposal, illustrated in his recent *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and the Method of Metaphysics*, will be explored. According to Gava's reading, metaphysics is at the core of Kant's project in the whole *KrV*: moreover, this work can be conceived as a "doctrine of method" of metaphysics. In this discipline, "a preliminary clarification of the proper 'method' is needed, because we risk improperly using principles that belong to 'sensibility' to represent objects of the 'understanding', which are its subject matter"⁶⁴. This idea seems to be strongly supported by Kant himself:

Now the concern of this critique of pure speculative reason consists in the attempt to transform the accepted procedure of metaphysics, undertaking an entire revolution [...]. It is a *treatise on the method*, not a system of the science itself; but it catalogs the entire outline of the science of metaphysics, both in respect of its boundaries and in respect of its entire internal structure.⁶⁵

Also in the *Analytic of Concepts*, he labels the investigation he is conducting as a "doctrine of method"⁶⁶, with the aim of showing that the set of cognitions making up metaphysics can be considered a science because it can amount to a system, possessing architectonic unity⁶⁷. To obtain the latter, a science must possess "systematic coherence" (i.e., the body of cognitions belonging to it must be interconnected in such a way that it involves relations of "either logical implication, explanatory support, or both", without contradiction) and must be "able to be considered an expression of an 'idea'"⁶⁸. As to the identification of the idea which is capable of rendering metaphysics a science, Gava suggests to follow the *conceptus cosmicus (Weltbegriff)* of philosophy as presented by Kant in the *Architectonic of Pure Reason*: in other words, it is only by pursuing metaphysics according to its *Weltbegriff* that its architectonic unity can be sought⁶⁹.

Until now, however, the concept of philosophy has been only a *scholastic concept*, namely that of a system of cognition that is sought only as a science without having as its end anything more than the systematic unity of this knowledge, thus the logical perfection of cognition. But there is also a *worldly*

⁶⁴ Gava, 2023, p. 1. Other disciplines, as Kant had already realized by the time of the *Inaugural Dissertation*, do not require to be preceded by a doctrine of method: in mathematics and natural science "use gives the method", but when it comes to "pure philosophy", "method precedes all science" (AA 02:410-411).

⁶⁵ B xxii.

⁶⁶ A 83 / B 109.

⁶⁷ Gava, 2023, p. 2. Coherently, Gava excludes that "the principal task of a doctrine of method" is "to identify procedures of investigation or argument that are appropriate within a particular science" (ibid.).

⁶⁸ Cf. ivi, pp. 28-29.

⁶⁹ Cf. ibid.

concept [*Weltbegriff*] (*conceptus cosmicus*) [...]. From this point of view philosophy is the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*) and the philosopher is not an artist of reason but the legislator of human reason.⁷⁰

Therefore: while metaphysics according to the school concept of philosophy aims at organizing a priori discursive cognition in a system, metaphysics according to the worldly concept of philosophy organizes these same cognitions with the chief purpose of realizing the final end (*Endzweck*) of human reason, i.e., “the entire vocation [*Bestimmung*] of human beings”⁷¹, which is, in turn, the highest good. This end is such that every man, through its reason, must essentially be interested in its realization: coherently, “a *worldly concept* here means one that concerns that which necessarily interests everyone” (while the *scholastic concept* determines “the aim of a science [...] only as one of the skills for certain arbitrary ends”⁷²). In Gava’s interpretation, metaphysics cannot become a science in accordance with the school concept, because it “fails to grasp the proper idea of the whole”; since “reference to ‘essential ends’ of reason and to the moral vocation of human beings are elements that essentially belong to the *proper* idea of metaphysics”, the latter must be conceived according to its worldly concept⁷³. The orientation towards the highest good is therefore a condition for attaining architectonic unity in metaphysics. Furthermore, it is only philosophy according to its *Weltbegriff* that is interested in determining the limits of rational cognition and, therefore, properly recognizes the necessity of a critique of reason: the philosopher who merely follows the school concept of this discipline is unable to recognize “the practical interest that drives his investigation” and to determine whether his theoretical investigations about the highest subjects of metaphysics – the soul, freedom and God – can by principle succeed or not⁷⁴.

⁷⁰ A 838-839 / B 866-867, translation modified.

⁷¹ A 840 / B 868.

⁷² A 839 / B 867, translation modified.

⁷³ Gava, 2023, p. 33.

⁷⁴ Ivi, p. 37. More specifically, Gava maintains that the philosopher who follows the school concept of philosophy “also has an interest in the highest good, but he does *not* consciously or explicitly recognize it”. This interest is not merely speculative, but also (and most of all) practical; former metaphysicians, however, “failed to acknowledge the *practical* interest animating their *theoretical* efforts”, so “they made themselves unable to set *limits* to those efforts”. In short, Gava intends to suggest the idea that “when we do not *consciously* realize that we are pursuing an investigation for the purposes of a specific interest of ours, we are not in a position to question the legitimacy of our investigation”, i.e., “to ask ourselves whether that investigation can obtain results” (ibid.).

In this sense, the building by Kant of a system of metaphysics according to its *Weltbegriff* has the aim of: firstly, determining the constitutive elements of all a priori cognition (this task is fulfilled by his reformed *metaphysica generalis*, i.e., transcendental philosophy); and secondly, opening up a space within which it is possible to *think* (even if not to *know*, according to the principles of transcendental philosophy itself) entities with respect to which the practical interest of reason far outweighs its theoretical interest (this task should be fulfilled by his reformed *metaphysica specialis* as a purely intellectual discipline). At the same time, however, the practical interest itself unlocks a wider space within which *theoretical* investigation is still legitimate, even though it cannot reach proper knowledge: the need of reason to “orient itself in thinking [*sich im Denken orientieren*]”⁷⁵ even where the “touchstone [*Proberstein*]”⁷⁶ of experience is missing motivates the possibility of an extension of its boundaries as long as a different epistemic attitude is assumed⁷⁷.

2.2 Reforming *metaphysica generalis*

Ever since its ancient origins, the discipline of metaphysics found itself in a state of ambiguity, due to its “curious duplication”⁷⁸ with respect to its object: it is *both* “a science which investigates being as being [$\tau\acute{o}\ \acute{o}\nu\ \eta\ \acute{o}\nu$]”⁷⁹ and the science of the supersensible *qua* highest being⁸⁰. Through the time, this twofold content resulted in a division of metaphysics in two branches, coherently with the Aristotelian approach: by one side,

⁷⁵ AA 08:133.

⁷⁶ A 295 / B 352. See also A 425 / B 453, A 711 / B 739.

⁷⁷ The modalities of alternative epistemic attitudes from that of *Wissen* will be discussed in Chapter 3.

⁷⁸ Heidegger, 1991, XVIII, p. 7, my translation.

⁷⁹ Aristotle & Ross, 1928, vol. VIII (*Metaphysica*), 1003a. This definition of metaphysics is suggested by Aristotle in Book Γ of *Metaphysics*. Kant himself recalls the Greek origins of the discipline of ontology when opening the *Ontology* section of his lessons of metaphysics included in *Metaphysik L2*: “The word itself [ontology] comes from the Greek, and just means the *science of being*” (AA 28:542).

⁸⁰ This definition of metaphysics, instead, is found in Book Λ of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*: according to it, metaphysics has as its object the unmoved mover.

metaphysica generalis, i.e., ontology, as the knowledge of the being in totality⁸¹, and by the other side, *metaphysica specialis* as the knowledge of the highest domains of being⁸².

For Kant, as mentioned above, the task of reforming *metaphysica generalis*, i.e., ontology, assumes a pivotal role with respect to the question as to the real possibility of metaphysics in its “ultimate purpose”⁸³, i.e., *metaphysica specialis*. As he writes in *Über die Fortschritte der Metaphysik*:

Ontology is that science (as part of metaphysics) which consists in a system of all concepts of the understanding, and principles, but only so far as they refer to objects that can be given to the senses, and thus confirmed by experience. It makes no allusion to the super-sensible, which is nevertheless the final aim of metaphysics, and thus belongs to the latter only as a propaedeutic, as the hallway or vestibule of metaphysics proper, and is called transcendental philosophy, because it contains the conditions and first elements of all our *knowledge a priori*.⁸⁴

Since “ontology is the first part that actually belongs to metaphysics”⁸⁵, it follows that “to determine the possibility of metaphysics proper it is necessary to begin by examining the nature of ontology and the boundaries for the valid use of its concepts and principles”⁸⁶.

In the *KrV* Kant mentions ontology twice. He refers to it for the first time at the end of the *Transcendental Analytic*:

The *Transcendental Analytic* accordingly has this important result: That the understanding can never accomplish *a priori* anything more than to anticipate the form of a possible experience in general, and, since that which is not appearance cannot be an object of experience, it can never overstep the limits of sensibility, within which alone objects are given to us. Its principles are merely principles of the exposition of appearances, and the proud name of an ontology, which presumes to offer synthetic *a priori*

⁸¹ It is useful to consider, as a touchstone, Baumgarten’s conception of ontology in *Metaphysica*, the textbook followed by Kant for his university lectures: this discipline is conceived as the “science of the general predicates of being” (Baumgarten, 1963, §4). The central questions it deals with are: “What is *ens*, and what are its structures?” (Nuzzo, 2018, p. 25); Baumgarten’s answer is that *ens* is “the possible determinable with regard to existence” (Baumgarten, 1963, §61). Moreover, as Nuzzo explains, “the predicates of being are that (*quid*) by virtue of which being becomes intelligible” to the “determining power of the intellect”; ontology is therefore “the science of the first principles of cognition that are the general (or, traditionally, the ‘transcendental’) predicates of beings insofar as they are individuals” (Nuzzo, 2018, p. 25). On this topic, see also Look, 2018, pp. 14-15.

⁸² Cf. Heidegger, 1991, XVIII, p. 9.

⁸³ AA 20:260.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ AA 28:542.

⁸⁶ Lu-Adler, 2018, p. 59.

cognitions of things in general in a systematic doctrine [...], must give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding.⁸⁷

This passage seems to suggest the impossibility, according to the results of the *Transcendental Aesthetic* and the *Transcendental Analytic*, of former, traditional ontology, which pretended to obtain “*a priori* cognitions of things in general”; and coherently, the necessity for it to renounce its claims and “give way” to a less pretentious discipline, i.e., an “analytic of the pure understanding”, in order to found metaphysics on solid bases. The *Doctrine of Method*, however, in a (partly) already-quoted passage, mentions again ontology by identifying it with transcendental philosophy:

Metaphysics in this narrower sense consists of *transcendental philosophy* and the *physiology* of pure reason. The former considers only the *understanding* and reason itself in a system of all concepts and principles that are related to objects in general, without assuming objects that *would be given (Ontologia)*; the latter considers *nature*, i.e., the sum total of *given* objects (whether they are given by the senses or, if one will, by another kind of intuition), and is therefore *physiology* (though only *rationalis*).⁸⁸

This time Kant seems to employ the Latin term for the discipline *Ontologia* equating it with “transcendental philosophy”, whose mentioned feature is the same implicitly recognized to the “analytic of the pure understanding” in the other passage, as distinct from ontology.

To solve this apparent puzzle, as Huaping Lu-Adler suggests, it seems possible to identify ontology and transcendental philosophy in the sense of an “extensional equivalence”⁸⁹. In the first of the two passages, by “ontology” Kant is presumably

⁸⁷ A 246 -247 / B 303.

⁸⁸ A 845 / B 873.

⁸⁹ Lu-Adler, 2018, p. 53. According to Gualtiero Lorini, instead, Kant’s shift from ontology to transcendental philosophy should be interpreted in light of the way of exposition of the “analogy”. In *Metaphysik Volckmann*, in fact, Kant refers to transcendental philosophy by employing an analogy: “transcendental philosophy is towards metaphysics what logic is towards philosophy. Logic contains the general rules of our understanding, whether or not based on experience, and so it is an introduction to the whole philosophy. Transcendental philosophy is an introduction to pure philosophy, which is a part of philosophy as a whole” (AA 28:363). As Kant points out in *Prol*, the analogy in philosophy does not express “an imperfect similarity between two things, but rather a perfect similarity between two relations in wholly dissimilar things” (AA 04:357; see also A 179 / B 222): this notion should therefore be interpreted in light of the Aristotelian analogy, conceived as “the identity of two *qualitative relationships*” (Lorini, 2015, p. 82). Furthermore, as a principle, its valid use is merely regulative, and not constitutive towards object of experience (i.e., appearances) (cf. A 179-180 / B 222). Understood in this sense, the notion of analogy also helps understand the relationship between ontology and transcendental philosophy because it sheds light

alluding to former ontology, as an alleged system of synthetic a priori cognitions of things in general (*Dinge überhaupt*). This approach of traditional ontology, however, errs on the side of pride, insofar as it does not recognize the epistemic limitation of human reason, which restricts the latter to cognition of appearances and not of things in general. More fundamentally, it lacks knowledge of the distinction itself between *Erscheinungen* and *Dinge an sich*, and therefore does not realize that the synthetic a priori knowledge that it generates is not about things in general, but rather “its principles are merely principles of the exposition of appearances” because the understanding “can never overstep the limits of sensibility, within which alone objects are given to us”⁹⁰. Ontology should therefore suspend its own activity and “understand itself in its finitude”⁹¹: what is lacking in former *metaphysica generalis* is “a preliminary reflection on the limits within which pure concepts can be applied”⁹².

The apparent renunciation to ontology at the end of the *Transcendental Analytic*, therefore, “is not an abandonment of ontology per se”: rather, it only “signals a first step toward clarifying what it should be”⁹³.

2.2.1 Transcendental philosophy

From the examination of the legitimacy and the boundaries of ontology, the Kantian account of a reformed ontology as transcendental philosophy emerges⁹⁴. It is the outcome of the application to former *metaphysica generalis* of the critical method according to which it is possible to obtain a *critical* ontology qua transcendental philosophy, as directly opposed to a *dogmatic* one. In short, “ontology qua transcendental

on the shift between the constitutive perspective of the former to the regulative point of view of the latter (cf. Lorini, 2015, pp. 82-83).

⁹⁰ A 247 / B 303.

⁹¹ Heidegger, 1962, p. 129.

⁹² De Boer, 2020, p. 98.

⁹³ Lu-Adler, 2018, p. 55. This idea seems to be confirmed by Ameriks’s approach, according to whom “the most recent evidence confirms that Kant was unwilling to break away fully from traditional ontology”. In his view, renouncing completely to ontology would have meant “giving up the ontological implications of transcendental idealism, something Kant was not ready to do” (Ameriks, 1992a, p. 272).

⁹⁴ It must be briefly mentioned that Kant “is not the first to identify ontology with transcendental philosophy”, since in the scholastic tradition it was an established practice to describe a metaphysical science as “transcendental” (because of its dealing with the transcendentals – *unum, verum, bonum* – that characterize being *qua* being) (Lu-Adler, 2018, pp. 55-56).

philosophy is an ontology secured on the basis of a critique of pure reason”⁹⁵, as the “transformative” work to be pursued upon the accepted procedure of traditional ontology.

The fundamental results of Kant’s reform of ontology consist: first of all, in the radical endorsement of the “Copernican turn”, i.e., the shift of focus from cognition of objects to cognition of our way of cognizing objects, which we can summarize in the concept of “transcendental”; and second, in the resulting limitation of the domain of ontology to the objects of possible experience (as a consequence of the confinement of our possibility to obtain synthetic a priori cognition to the domain of appearances).

Kant’s own definition of transcendental philosophy is well known:

I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible *a priori*. A *system* of such concepts would be called *transcendental philosophy*.⁹⁶

This new discipline, therefore, as a result of the *Kopernikanische Wende*, does not deal directly with objects of cognition, but investigates the conditions of possibility of our cognition of them, by exploring the possibility for human reason to obtain any cognition of objects at all, as well as the modalities and the structures through which it is possible. It is precisely for the latter reason that, for Kant, “the proud name of an ontology [...] must give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding”⁹⁷, meaning that a critical ontology cannot but be an analytic of the pure understanding. Thus: it is not cognitions of objects that which makes up an ontology; on the contrary, it is precisely the development of an ontology in terms of an analytic of the pure intellect that reveals the possibility of empirical cognition, hence of cognition of objects. As expressed most plainly in the later lessons of metaphysics contained in *Metaphysics L₂*, “transcendental philosophy is the system of all our pure *a priori* cognitions; customarily

⁹⁵ Lu-Adler, 2018, p. 66. Lu-Adler’s account is precious and insightful because it also takes into consideration Kant’s lectures of metaphysics, including *Metaphysik L₁*, *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, *Metaphysik Volckmann*, *Metaphysik L₂* and *Metaphysik Dohna*. Considering passages from the lectures is of great importance, since, as Gualtiero Lorini points out, they “provide a clarification of the real relationship between transcendental philosophy and ontology, which does not appear so explicitly within the *KrV*” (Lorini, 2015, p. 78).

⁹⁶ A 11-12 / B 25.

⁹⁷ A 247 / B 303.

it is called *ontology*”, i.e., “the doctrine of elements of all my concepts that my understanding can have only *a priori*”⁹⁸.

As a result: if by “ontology” a science that deals with objects themselves (as former ontology did) is meant, then ontology and transcendental philosophy are two entirely distinct disciplines; but if by “ontology” we understand a *critical* ontology, then they are identical, insofar as transcendental philosophy is precisely the shape that ontology takes after the critical inspection into its own conditions of possibility (through an analytic of the pure understanding). As the transcripts of his lectures of metaphysics testify, Kant himself was well aware of the risk of this confusion:

[...] the science of all basic concepts and basic propositions upon which all of our pure cognitions of reason rest is ontology. But this science will not be properly called ontology. For to have a thing in general as an object is as much as to have no object [...]. But this science has no object that would be distinguishable from the essence of reason, but rather it considers understanding and reason itself, namely their basic concepts and basic propositions in their pure use (or of pure reason and pure understanding); the most fitting name would be transcendental philosophy.⁹⁹

Within the *KrV*, however, a “system” of transcendental philosophy cannot be found: this work is a “treatise on the method, not a system of the science itself”¹⁰⁰. As Kant specifies in the *Introduction*:

Transcendental philosophy is here the idea of a science, for which the critique of pure reason is to outline the entire plan architectonically, i.e., from principles, with a full guarantee for the completeness and certainty of all the components that comprise this edifice. It is the system of all principles of pure reason. That this critique is not itself already called transcendental philosophy rests solely on the fact that in order to be a complete system it would also have to contain an exhaustive analysis of all human cognition *a priori*. [...] To the critique of pure reason there accordingly belongs everything that constitutes transcendental philosophy, and it is the complete idea of transcendental philosophy, but is not yet this science itself, since it goes only so far in the analysis as is requisite for the complete estimation of synthetic *a priori* cognition.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ AA 28:541-543.

⁹⁹ AA 29:786. This passage is from the *Ontology* section of *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, dated between 1782 and 1783.

¹⁰⁰ B xxii. Cf. Heidegger, 1962, p. 21.

¹⁰¹ A 13-14 / B 27-28. In the second edition, the first sentence (“*Die Idee einer Wissenschaft*”) is substituted by the sentence “*hier nur eine Idee*”, marking the difference between the mere *idea* of transcendental philosophy, exposed here in the *KrV*, and the actual execution of its system.

To account for this difference between the preparatory task that the *KrV* undertakes and the eventual, future “complete system” of transcendental philosophy, it is noteworthy that right before the above-quoted passage, Kant introduces the notion of a “transcendental critique”, defining it as an “investigation” which “does not aim at the amplification of cognitions themselves but only at their correction” and works to “supply the touchstone of the worth or worthlessness of all cognitions *a priori*”; he states that this discipline is “that with which we are now concerned”, meaning that transcendental critique is carried out in the *KrV* itself: it is a “preparation, if possible, for an organon”, i.e., for the system of transcendental philosophy proper. Karin de Boer stresses this difference between a transcendental philosophy and a transcendental critique, considering both to be species of the broader genus of transcendental cognition¹⁰². According to her, transcendental philosophy in the strict sense consists in a “first-order investigation into the *a priori* concepts and principles constitutive of any cognition of objects”¹⁰³: coherently with Kant’s remark quoted above, she considers only *part* of this science to be elaborated in the *KrV*. Kant probably had in mind to fully implement the system of transcendental philosophy as the first section of his planned metaphysical system, in its theoretical part (metaphysics of nature). In the *Introduction*, he deems this duty as not particularly challenging:

This completeness of the analysis as well as the derivation from the *a priori* concepts that are to be provided in the future will nevertheless be easy to complete as long as they are present as exhaustive principles of synthesis, and if nothing is lacking in them in regard to this essential aim.¹⁰⁴

However, the *KrV* itself entails portions of this science insofar as a preliminary account of the concepts and principles constitutive of any cognition is provided: more specifically, de Boer holds part of the *Transcendental Analytic* (the metaphysical deduction of the categories and the chapter about the principles of the pure understanding) to belong to transcendental philosophy, as a first-order mode of investigation.

¹⁰² Kant defines transcendental cognition in the following terms: “And here I make a remark the import of which extends to all of the following considerations, and that we must keep well in view, namely that not every *a priori* cognition must be called transcendental, but only that by means of which we cognize that and how certain representations (intuitions or concepts) are applied entirely *a priori*, or are possible (i.e., the possibility of cognition or its use *a priori*)” (A 56 / B 80-81).

¹⁰³ De Boer, 2020, p. 74.

¹⁰⁴ A 14 / B 28.

Transcendental critique, on the other hand, is a “propaedeutic, second-order investigation” into the very possibility of metaphysics, which, in turn, takes the shape of an inquiry into “the conditions under which the use of a priori concepts and principles is warranted”. This discipline is carried out in the *KrV* alone and it is supposed to demonstrate that and why “principles derived from pure concepts [...] are absolutely necessary to turn appearances into objects of cognition, but cannot be used to achieve cognition of supersensible objects”; in other words, its aim is to show that pure concepts and principles of the pure understanding can be legitimately used “with regard to objects of possible experience alone”, thus marking the distance from former ontology. De Boer deems this task to be at stake in the transcendental deduction, in the schematism chapter and in the chapter about the distinction between phaenomena and noumena¹⁰⁵.

In the *Preface* to the second edition of the *KrV*, Kant draws up a balance of the results achieved through his “altered method of our way of thinking” with respect to the first part of metaphysics:

This experiment succeeds as well as we could wish, and it promises to metaphysics the secure course of a science in its first part, where it concerns itself with concepts *a priori* to which the corresponding objects appropriate to them can be given in experience. For after this alteration in our way of thinking we can very well explain the possibility of a cognition *a priori*, and what is still more, we can provide satisfactory proofs of the laws that are the *a priori* ground of nature, as the sum total of objects of experience – which were both impossible according to the earlier way of proceeding.¹⁰⁶

2.3 Reforming *metaphysica specialis*

As seen above, Kant’s reform of *metaphysica generalis* achieves a positive result insofar as it is reframed as transcendental philosophy. The latter, however, as presented in the *KrV*, is dependent on the more fundamental aim of investigating the conditions of possibility of “metaphysics proper” (or metaphysics in its “final aim”¹⁰⁷). Recalling Kant’s words in *Über die Fortschritte der Metaphysik*, in fact, transcendental philosophy is not an end in itself: rather, it “has as its purpose the founding of a metaphysics, whose

¹⁰⁵ For this and previous quotations: De Boer, 2020, pp. 74-93.

¹⁰⁶ B xviii-xix.

¹⁰⁷ AA 20:260.

purpose in turn envisages as an aim of pure reason the extension of the latter from the limits of the sensible to the field of the super-sensible”¹⁰⁸. About this “second part” of metaphysics, however, it does not seem possible, at first, to reach an equally promising result:

But from this deduction of our faculty of cognizing *a priori* in the first part of metaphysics, there emerges a very strange result, and one that appears very disadvantageous to the whole purpose with which the second part of metaphysics concerns itself, namely that with this faculty we can never get beyond the boundaries of possible experience, which is nevertheless precisely the most essential occupation of this science.¹⁰⁹

This “disadvantageous” outcome is due to the central tenet of Kant’s novel transcendental philosophy: the limitation of synthetic *a priori* knowledge to the domain of possible experience. As seen in the first Chapter of the present work, in fact, the fundamental error of former metaphysics consists, according to Kant, in disregarding the epistemic limitation of human reason, leading to an extension of cognition claims beyond the boundaries of an experience possible for us. Therefore, the key point of his critique of traditional metaphysics lies in the ignorance by the latter of the crucial distinction, established through transcendental idealism, between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich*: this neglect, and the lack of means to remedy it (namely, critique), prevented metaphysics from acknowledging the unavoidable limitation of its cognition to the domain of possible experience, thus of appearances. Being unaware of where its knowledge claims should have stopped, it believed it could extend it, in the form of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, to supersensible entities, so as to satisfy the reason’s need to reach the unconditioned. It was thus confident that the activity of the understanding in the domain of *metaphysica specialis* could amount to cognition of objects – the soul, the world as a whole and God –, with the result of “objectifying” these unconditioned ideas of reason. Hence, the guiding thread of Kant’s critique to former general and special metaphysics lies in their claim to possess “more synthetic *a priori* knowledge than they actually do”¹¹⁰: if ontology claims its possibility to know (empirical) things as they are in themselves, then nothing stops special metaphysics as well from claiming to obtain cognition of supersensible

¹⁰⁸ AA 20:272-273.

¹⁰⁹ B xix-xx.

¹¹⁰ Chignell, 2014, p. 579.

entities; instead, safeguarding what might lie beyond the domain of our possible experience is of extreme importance for the essential ends of human reason. According to the main tenets of transcendental idealism, therefore, human reason cannot cognize neither things as they are in themselves, nor potential supersensible entities which surpass the limits of an experience possible for us.

It is clear, consequently, how “by this transformation of *metaphysica generalis*, the foundation of traditional metaphysics is shaken and the edifice of *metaphysica specialis* begins to totter”¹¹¹: the result is the impossibility for the latter to obtain any synthetic a priori knowledge about supersensible ideas like the soul, the world as such and God. In this consists the negative strand of Kant’s critique of pure reason with respect to the domain of special metaphysics. With regard to these concepts of reason, however, the possibility of thought remains open.

2.3.1 A purely intellectual discipline

The outcome of Kant’s critique to *metaphysica specialis* is its impossibility to obtain synthetic a priori cognition of its objects, namely the soul, the world as a whole and God. However, as he famously claims in the second *Preface*, a “reservation must also be well noted”: even though we cannot *cognize* these objects, “we at least must be able to *think* them as things in themselves”¹¹². The implied distinction between the domains of cognition and thought, as discussed in the previous chapter of this work, plays a crucial role in order to recognize a space of legitimacy for reason’s investigation into the objects of special metaphysics, even though, from an epistemic perspective, it does not achieve the status of theoretical cognition. In a nutshell: the negative strand of Kant’s critique to metaphysics does not necessarily rule out a space for theoretical research in the field of the supersensible, although this intellectual activity can never, by principle, result in theoretical cognition proper. In Karin de Boer’s words: “as long as metaphysics does not mistake such thoughts for objective cognitions, there is no reason to reject its capacity to conceive of things by means of the intellect alone”¹¹³. On the contrary: it is precisely

¹¹¹ Heidegger, 1962, p. 129.

¹¹² B xxvi.

¹¹³ De Boer, 2020, pp. 68-69.

because of the need to “defend the terrain of special metaphysics against inroads from sensible cognition”¹¹⁴ that, as Kant explains in the concluding chapter of the *Transcendental Analytic* (*On the ground of the distinction of all objects in general into phenomena and noumena*), the concept of a noumenon, as a merely “boundary concept”, is “necessary in order not to extend sensible intuition to things in themselves”, i.e., “in order to indicate that those [sensible] cognitions cannot extend their domain to everything that the understanding thinks”; in sum, the aim is precisely that of limiting “the pretension of sensibility”¹¹⁵, thus recognizing a domain in which the possibility of thought by means of the intellect alone still maintains its validity. The notion of a noumenon, differently from that of *Ding an sich*, seems to perform an *epistemic* function and not to carry any *ontological* commitment to a reality independent of our cognition (as, instead, the concept a thing in itself, in the interpretation here displayed, does): coherently, as Kant remarks, this concept must be admitted merely in a negative sense, and not in a positive sense. This is the reason why, according to Kant, “the doctrine of sensibility is at the same time the doctrine of the noumenon in the negative sense”¹¹⁶.

On the basis of the acknowledgment of this possibility, therefore, some authors recognize that Kant’s critique of metaphysics paves the way not only for a reformed version of ontology, but also for a reformed version of *metaphysica specialis*¹¹⁷: theoretical investigation by means of purely intellectual concepts can still legitimately be carried out even though it does not result in cognition, as long as metaphysicians are well aware of this impossibility. Therefore: metaphysics cannot become a science until it “seeks to determine the unconditioned by means of pure concepts the meaning of which presupposes pure time”¹¹⁸, i.e., the contribution from (pure) sensibility¹¹⁹, and until it

¹¹⁴ Ivi, p. 70.

¹¹⁵ A 254-255 / B 310-311.

¹¹⁶ Cf. B 307. The distinction between a noumenon in the negative sense and a noumenon in the positive sense is introduced only in the second edition of the *KrV*, and is explained by Kant in the following terms: “if by a noumenon we understand a *thing insofar as it is not an object of our sensible intuition*, because we abstract from the manner of our intuition of it, then this is a noumenon in the *negative* sense. But if we understand by that an *object of a non-sensible intuition*, then we assume a special kind of intuition, namely intellectual intuition, which, however, is not our own, and the possibility of which we cannot understand, and this would be the noumenon in a *positive* sense” (ibid.).

¹¹⁷ Cf. de Boer, 2020, p. 14.

¹¹⁸ Ivi, pp. 71-72.

¹¹⁹ As de Boer explains, “*pure sensibility is indispensable to obtain cognition proper* because it is precisely the act of synthesis carried out in pure time that allows the mind to objectify its representations, that is, to attribute them to an *object*” (ivi, pp. 63-64). According to the chapter *On the schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding*, explaining how is “the *application* of the category to appearances possible”,

pretends to obtain synthetic a priori cognition about its objects. Provided, however, that it abandons its “objectifying tendency”¹²⁰, it can still legitimately establish itself as a “purely intellectual discipline”¹²¹.

From a theoretical point of view, even though pure concepts of the understanding, in order to possess objective validity, would require the application of the schema, thus relying on time qua pure intuition, they would still have a “significance” – although merely “logical” – “even after abstraction from every sensible condition”: without schemata, “the categories are only functions of the understanding for concepts, but do not represent any object”, since that would require the contribution of sensibility¹²². “Unschematized” categories, hence, maintain a logical significance even though lacking objective validity¹²³: they provide the “mere unity of representations”, e.g., the unschematized category of substance “would signify nothing more than a something that can be thought as a subject (without being a predicate of something else)”¹²⁴. Therefore: unschematized, pure concepts of the understanding alone can never, of course, lead to any kind of cognition proper¹²⁵; however, they maintain a space of legitimacy insofar as they can be employed in the form of *mere thought*, which they make possible. This prospect seems to be supported by Kant’s own statement, when drawing the results of the deduction of the categories; right after concluding that “*no a priori* cognition is possible for us except solely of objects of possible experience”, he specifies in a footnote:

the latter “becomes possible by means of the transcendental time-determination which, as the schema of the concept of the understanding, mediates the subsumption of the latter under the former” (A 137-139 / B 176-178). The schema of a pure concept of the understanding is “a transcendental product of the imagination, which concerns the determination of the *inner sense* in general, in accordance with conditions of its form (*time*)” (A 142 / B 181, my emphasis). “The schemata are therefore nothing but *a priori time-determinations* in accordance with rules”, and they are “the true and sole conditions for providing them [the categories] with a relation to objects” (A 145-146 / B 184-185).

¹²⁰ De Boer, 2020, p. 256. By this expression, the author refers to the mistake of traditional metaphysics consisting in attributing purely intellectual representations (i.e., representations stemming from the understanding alone) to an object. In the field of special metaphysics, this attribution is unjustified because of the lack of a counterpart of the intellectual representation in intuition: no appearance of non-sensible entities is possible, i.e., purely intellectual entities cannot be proper *objects* for us because they cannot belong to the domain of a possible experience for us. In light of this impossibility, de Boer employs the expression “quasi-objects” to refer to the entities of *metaphysica specialis* (ivi, pp. 4, 71, 101, 209). See also ivi, pp. 45, 64, 221, 257.

¹²¹ Ivi, p. 65.

¹²² A 147 / B 186-187.

¹²³ Cf. Leech, 2024, p. 1414.

¹²⁴ A 147 / B 186.

¹²⁵ As Kant famously claims, “thoughts without contents are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind”, meaning that it is “just as necessary to make the mind’s concepts sensible (i.e., to add an object to them in intuition) as it is to make its intuitions understandable (i.e., to bring them under concepts)” (A 51 / B 76).

So that one may not prematurely take issue with the worrisome and disadvantageous consequences of this proposition, I will only mention that the categories are not restricted in *thinking* by the conditions of our sensible intuition, but have an unbounded field, and only the *cognition* of objects that we think, the determination of the object, requires intuition; in the absence of the latter, the thought of the object can still have its true and useful consequence for the *use* of the subject's *reason*, which, however, cannot be expounded here, for it is not always directed to the determination of the object, thus to cognition, but rather also to that of the subject and its willing.¹²⁶

This acknowledgement is essential in order to understand whether Kant left room for a reformed version of special metaphysics, or not. Karin de Boer believes it “hard to maintain that Kant intended to abolish former special metaphysics in all respects”¹²⁷, since the *Transcendental Dialectic*, i.e., the section in which the disciplines of *metaphysica specialis* are dealt with, entails not only a *negative* side, submitting them to criticism, but also an important *positive* strand, aimed at isolating the *rational* core of rational psychology, general cosmology and rational theology; a core, therefore, that can and should be preserved even after subjecting these disciplines to critical scrutiny. Marcus Willaschek refers to this “constructive” account as to “the other side of the *Transcendental Dialectic*”: in addition to a depiction of the errors involved in traditional metaphysics, in the *Dialectic* Kant also wants to show that it is precisely our reason, and not other contingent factors, “that entangles us in metaphysical speculation”¹²⁸. Willaschek refers to this positive strand of the *Dialectic* as the “Rational Sources Account”, consisting in a conjunction of three claims: first, pure reason raises metaphysical questions; second, it is “driven by its own need or its nature” to answer them; and third, these questions “arise from the very structure of rational thinking as such”¹²⁹.

Another valid reason to contend that Kant wanted to maintain a space of legitimacy for a reformed special metaphysics comes from the plan of the metaphysical system outlined in the *Architectonic of Pure Reason*, from which the intention can be inferred to reform and rehabilitate the metaphysical research of these disciplines, albeit under a new guise, after critique. According to this layout, the speculative part of

¹²⁶ B 166.

¹²⁷ De Boer, 2020, p. 231.

¹²⁸ Willaschek, 2018, pp. 163-165.

¹²⁹ Ivi, p. 3.

metaphysics (i.e., metaphysics in its narrower sense) “consists of four main parts”: ontology, rational physiology (divided into *physica rationalis* and *psychologia rationalis*¹³⁰), rational cosmology and rational theology; moreover, this division is architectonic, i.e., in conformity with the essential ends of human reason, and not merely technical, thus being “unchangeable and legislative”¹³¹. In addition, as already mentioned, Kant considered metaphysics to be “the only science” that could “rightly hope to be able to reach” its completion, turning into an “inventory of everything we possess through pure reason, ordered systematically”¹³². Even though Kant never wrote this “dogmatic” part of metaphysics, he sketched an outline according to which this system should be established: as regards metaphysics in its second and highest part, its system should be traced by relying on the table of categories as a guiding thread. This is testified by a passage from the *Prolegomena*:

This system of categories now makes all treatment of any object of pure reason itself systematic in turn, and it yields an undoubted instruction or guiding thread as to how and through what points of inquiry any metaphysical contemplation must be directed if it is to be complete; for it exhausts all moments of the understanding, under which every other concept must be brought. Thus too has arisen the table of principles, of whose completeness we can be assured only through the system of categories; and *even in the division of concepts that are supposed to go beyond the physiological use of the understanding, there is always the same guiding thread [Leitfaden] [...]*.¹³³

The table of categories, therefore, can provide the guideline to derive the concepts embraced in every discipline of former special metaphysics; moreover, the task of bringing the system of metaphysics to completion was not considered by Kant to be of great difficulty: in fact, after the *KrV*, “nothing remains to posterity except to adapt it in a *didactic* manner to its intentions, yet without being able to add to its content in the least”¹³⁴.

¹³⁰ As de Boer notes, “Kant seems to have held that one of the ideas of reason, the idea of the world, ought to be treated by two complementary branches of special metaphysics” (de Boer, 2020, p. 231).

¹³¹ A 846-847 / B 874-875.

¹³² A xix-xx.

¹³³ AA 04:325, my emphasis.

¹³⁴ A xx. An exposition of the derivation of the a priori system of transcendental ideas, relevant for an account of a possible reformed *metaphysica specialis*, is provided by Willaschek, 2018, pp. 167-187. Willaschek offers a description of transcendental ideas, i.e., concepts of pure reason, in terms of speculative ideas that arise from the attempt of theoretical reason to transcend, through necessary inferences, the conditions of experience and to cognize non-empirical objects (cf. A 327 / B 383-384). These ideas are necessary, purely rational, inferred concepts, and their objects is something unconditioned, thus not an

2.3.2 The regulative use of reason

The outcome of the discussion of the problem of metaphysics has, up to now, resulted in the possibility to bring about a transcendental philosophy, as a reformed, critical *metaphysica generalis* or ontology, and in the establishment of a legitimate space for a metaphysical investigation into non-sensible entities, provided that it is aware of its impossibility of amounting to cognition (unlike former *metaphysica specialis*). While transcendental philosophy can be built up as a scientific discipline, however, the branches belonging to special metaphysics, after being critically dissected in the *Transcendental Dialectic*, are prevented from any kind of synthetic a priori cognition. Their possibility of a purely intellectual activity about super-sensible entities has been recognized: if indeed

object of possible experience for us. They can be derived a priori in a system exhibiting a hierarchical scheme that guarantees completeness: at the top of the structure there is the concept of the unconditioned in general, as “the common title of all concepts of reason” (A 324 / B 380); then, all transcendental ideas fall into three classes, namely psychological, cosmological and theological ideas. The first two classes comprise four transcendental ideas: for the soul, they are substantiality, simplicity, unity and spirituality; for the world, they are the world as containing complete composition, then complete division, complete origin(s) and complete dependence; the last class includes only one transcendental idea, namely the notion of God as *ens realissimum*. In sum, the system consists in nine transcendental ideas. On the topic of the “deduction” of transcendental ideas (admitted by Kant, even if in a different form from the transcendental deduction of the categories, cf. A 669-671 / B 697-699), see also Gava, 2023, pp. 152-166. Furthermore, Karin de Boer offers in her book a sketch of how Kant’s projected system of pure reason, in its *specialis* section, might be. As regards rational physics, planned in the *Architectonic* but not dealt with in the *Transcendental Dialectic*, she maintains that Kant considered his later *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* from 1786 to at least partly instantiate that discipline (for more on this topic, see Pollok, 2001). As to rational psychology, Kant estimated it “to be a warranted part of metaphysics on the condition that it treat the soul not as object of cognition but as noumenon in the negative sense”: even though categories cannot be applied to the soul since the latter cannot be an appearance, this discipline can employ the transcendental predicates “that one would have to use *if one were to treat the soul as an object*”, which, de Boer contends, happens, e.g., in the context of practical philosophy. Of course, a reformed rational psychology cannot contain synthetic a priori judgements about the soul (cf. A 381, B 410), thus it does not amount to a doctrine proper. With respect to rational cosmology, if it conceives of the world as such in purely intellectual terms, it will not get entangled in conflicts. Through the table of categories, it is possible to derive four transcendental ideas (as “categories extended to the unconditioned”, A 409 / B 436) employed in this discipline: the idea that all appearances taken together constitute an absolute totality, that matter, qua appearance, is composed of indivisible elements, that the series of causes that account for the generation of a given appearance is complete, and that everything that exists, qua appearance, is ultimately grounded in something that itself is not grounded in something else. These ideas can be used in other disciplines “to conceive of the world qua sum total of objects of outer sense or appearances in particular respects”; Section 2.3.2 will deal with the modality of this possible use of transcendental ideas. Lastly, as regards rational theology, it is divided by Kant into transcendental theology and natural theology, but only the former can be purely intellectual: the objective reality of its conception of God, considered as ideal, “cannot be proved”, but “neither be refuted” (A 641 / B 669). Moreover, to transcendental theology belong the (transcendental) predicates according to which God must be conceived, but not a proof of His existence and properties. Though “very restricted”, this discipline is “of utmost necessity” (A 679 / B 707) because it prepares the ground for both a purely moral theology, and a conception of nature in teleological terms (de Boer, 2020, pp. 230-248).

this scope were to remain absolutely hollow, the positive, constructive side of the *Dialectic* would prove to be so scarce that it would result in a mere, empty possibility of thought devoid of any content. What would therefore be the purpose of a discipline, if not only its possibility of obtaining cognition was essentially precluded, but also it could not in any way contribute to our knowledge?

As Günter Zöller claims, in the *Dialectic* “the demolition of the old metaphysics takes place”, but at the same time, “the foundation of a new metaphysics of the non-sensible is also emerging – the doctrine of ideas of the theoretical unconditioned in the regulative use of reason”¹³⁵. To account for this “constructive” side of the *Dialectic*, it must preliminarily be noted that metaphysical disciplines, such as rational psychology, rational cosmology and rational theology, provide our knowledge with an indispensable means: through the activity that reason performs in these fields, transcendental ideas arise in a natural way. The role of the latter does not consist in yielding cognition of the transcendental object to which they relate, for that would be illusory, but rather to provide additional resources to enhance our (empirical) cognition. Metaphysical thinking, therefore, to which reason necessarily and naturally leads, may still present some unexplored potential, different from cognition but nevertheless of essential importance to the latter.

As mentioned above, for the purposes of this investigation, it is crucial to understand what positive role and value Kant recognized to a reformed metaphysics not only in its *generalis* part but also in its *specialis* one: with regard to the latter, its merit consists in two fundamental gains. First of all, in its vital role of providing practical philosophy with means to properly conceive its fundamental concepts, eradicating the negative impact of former metaphysical systems: as Kant himself claims, the practical part of philosophy would have relied on the results obtained in the theoretical part, the latter providing a preparatory work that would have been of great benefit to religion and morality¹³⁶. Practical reason would have later procured objective reality to the entities that theoretical reason could only establish as possible: in other words, it would provide the results of theoretical reason with a content¹³⁷.

¹³⁵ Zöller, 2011, p. 13, my translation.

¹³⁶ Cf. B xxxi, A 849 / B 877.

¹³⁷ Cf. de Boer, 2020, p. 5. De Boer clearly states that “what ought to be preserved in the case of special metaphysics are the ideas of reason, in their capacity as regulative principles, as well as a number of purely

In the second place, the transcendental ideas provided by disciplines belonging to *metaphysica specialis*, although they cannot themselves lead to cognition, offer an outstanding contribution to the latter: in fact, Kant's account of the role and use of transcendental ideas at the end of the *Doctrine of Elements* seems to provide a counterbalance to the *pars destruens* of the *Dialectic*, shedding a new light on the entire problem of metaphysics. This concluding, but extremely valuable *Appendix* has as its topic the regulative use of the ideas of pure reason.

[...] the transcendental ideas are never of *constitutive* use, so that the concepts of certain objects would thereby be given, and in case one so understands them, they are merely sophistical (dialectical) concepts. On the contrary, however, they have an excellent and indispensably necessary *regulative* use, namely that of *directing the understanding to a certain goal* respecting which the lines of direction of all its rules converge at one point, which, although it is only an idea (*focus imaginarius*) – i.e., a point from which the concepts of the understanding do not really proceed, since it lies entirely outside the bounds of possible experience – nonetheless still serves to obtain for these concepts the greatest unity alongside the greatest extension.¹³⁸

Reason is necessarily tempted to make a *constitutive* use of transcendental ideas, i.e., to intend them as true representations of objects (in Kant's words: "so that the concepts of certain objects would thereby be given"), as if an object could ever correspond to their concept in intuition. This, however, merely results in illusion, since, by definition, the entities to which transcendental ideas point are non-empirical entities and could never be objects of intuition, because they transcend the limits of a possible experience for us; in other words, our possibility to think these entities occurs merely through unschematized categories, without the possibility of providing the latter with a corresponding intuition. Despite the impossibility of a *constitutive* use of transcendental ideas, the possibility of a *regulative* use of the latter appears as an attractive resource for metaphysical thinking: not only, indeed this is "excellent and indispensably necessary".

intellectual determinations. A priori judgments about human freedom, the soul, and God, conversely, ought to be transferred to a discipline supposedly immune to skeptical attacks on the theoretical part of metaphysics, namely, its practical part" (ivi, p. 79) (cf. B xxi, B xxxii-xxxiv). Coherently, Marcus Willaschek underlines the strong link between the success of Kant's practical metaphysics and the "failure" of his speculative metaphysics (Willaschek, 2018, p. 44). However, Günter Zöllner speaks of the "indirect, negative enablement" of metaphysics of morals as belonging only "marginally" to the *KrV*, since the latter is "primarily and actually oriented towards the direct, positive enablement of 'metaphysics of nature'" (Zöllner, 2011, p. 13, my translation).

¹³⁸ A 644 / B 672.

Using ideas of reason regulatively means to give them the possibility to orientate the research of the understanding towards a point of convergence, which itself lies beyond the limits of possible experience, but nevertheless serves as a vital guide for our search of unity in cognition. Although claiming to grasp an object corresponding to this *focus imaginarius* would be mere illusion (and would result in a constitutive use of the ideas), the possibility of thinking the transcendental idea is the only means capable of providing “the greatest unity alongside the greatest extension” to the concepts provided by the understanding¹³⁹.

Moreover, Kant links the constitutive use of ideas with an “apodictic” use of reason, consisting in the use that applies when, in “deriving the particular from the universal” (as the task of reason prescribes), “the universal is *in itself certain* and given, and only *judgment* is required for subsuming, and the particular is necessarily determined through it”. However, this can never be the case when it comes to entities that surpass the limit of experience, as those that would correspond to transcendental ideas: the universal cannot by any means be given in experience. On the contrary, the “hypothetical” use of reason, i.e., “on the basis of ideas as problematic concepts”, cannot but assume the universal “only problematically”, as “a mere idea” and not committing to its truth, while the particular is given. The purpose of this use of reason is to bring “unity into particular cognitions as far as possible”, and thereby to ultimately approximate to “the systematic unity of the understanding’s cognition”¹⁴⁰. Having the systematic unity of cognition as its focus, the regulative use that reason makes of its own ideas brings a positive and constructive contribution to empirical knowledge, lying in the unifying role that these ideas bear. This duty is not at all something accidental or secondary: on the contrary, “the law of reason to seek unity is necessary, since without it we would have no reason”¹⁴¹. The impossibility for reason to determine the object corresponding to the transcendental idea does not mean that it leads us to deception in its search for unity, but simply that it “goes much too far from experience or observation ever to catch up with”. Even though it does not find an object, its role in pointing “the way toward systematic unity” is crucial and irreplaceable: for this reason, the regulative use of reason is said to be “legitimate and

¹³⁹ For this and previous quotations: *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ For this and previous quotations: A 646-647 / B 674-675.

¹⁴¹ A 651 / B 679.

excellent”¹⁴². Systematic unity, however, works as a “mere idea”, i.e., it is not regarded as “given in itself” (as this would result in transcendental realism), but rather it is only a “*projected* unity”: reason projects systematic unity on nature in its constant search for higher unity of its cognitions, but, as long as it is conscious of the impossibility to conclude to the systematicity of nature itself, as if it was something given in itself, its activity is rather fruitful and helpful for empirical cognition itself. At this level, however, the tendency of reason to find maximum unity in cognition should not be misunderstood as the knowledge of a systematic unity in nature itself: to claim that the structure of reality corresponds to that of our cognition would be to commit to transcendental realism, from which Kant intends to distance himself in every possible way.

It is noteworthy that the possibility of a regulative use of reason applies not only to transcendental ideas, but also to principles, through which reason “prepares the field for the understanding”: these are the principles of “*sameness of kind* in the manifold under higher genera”, the principle of the “*variety* of what is same in kind under lower species”, and the “law of *affinity* of all concepts”¹⁴³; in short, principles of *homogeneity*, *specification* and *continuity* of forms. Once again, these principles should not be employed constitutively, i.e., according to the idea that reality itself exhibits the same structure of reason; rather, they should be used regulatively, i.e., as rules “for possible experience”, as “heuristic principles”, that contribute in elaborating experience¹⁴⁴. Coherently: one asserts not that the unity reason strives for is found in nature, but rather “that one must seek it for the benefit of reason”¹⁴⁵.

However, the tendency of reason to take its principles as constitutive, i.e., as actually describing reality as it is itself, seems to be something ineliminable:

What is strange about these principles, and what alone concerns us, is this: that *they seem to be transcendental*, and even though they contain mere ideas to be followed in the empirical use of reason, which reason can follow only asymptotically, as it were, i.e., merely by approximation, without ever reaching them, yet these principles, as synthetic propositions *a priori*, *nevertheless have objective but indeterminate validity*, [...].¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² For this and previous quotations: A 668 / B 696.

¹⁴³ A 657 / B 685.

¹⁴⁴ A 663 / B 691.

¹⁴⁵ A 649 / B 677.

¹⁴⁶ A 663 / B 691, my emphasis.

The peculiarity of the principles of reason is the inability to eradicate the illusion that stems from them, consisting in considering them to be true description of how reality is in itself. Although this illusion is now unmasked thanks to the means provided by transcendental idealism, nevertheless it continues to exert its influence as something belonging to the very nature of reason, considering the strength with which it establishes itself:

In fact it cannot even be seen how there could be a logical principle of rational unity among rules unless a transcendental principle is presupposed, through which such a systematic unity, as pertaining to the object itself, is assumed *a priori* as necessary. For by what warrant can reason in its logical use claim to treat the manifoldness of the powers which nature gives to our cognition as merely a concealed unity, and to derive them as far as it is able from some fundamental power, when reason is free to admit that it is just as possible that all powers are different in kind, and that its derivation of them from a systematic unity is not in conformity with nature? For then reason would proceed directly contrary to its vocation, since it would set as its goal an idea that entirely contradicts the arrangement of nature.¹⁴⁷

A tension seems to emerge insofar as the *logical* use of reason (i.e., directed towards the unity in the manifold of the understanding's cognitions) appears to necessarily lie on a *transcendental* use of reason with respect to the same principles (i.e., a use that “would make systematic unity not merely subjectively and logically necessary, as method, but objectively necessary”¹⁴⁸): logical principles seem therefore to presuppose transcendental ones, i.e., principles that pretend to apply to nature (considered as the whole of appearances); in other words, it seems necessary to presuppose “that nature itself is systematically ordered”¹⁴⁹. However, the limitation of our epistemic faculties does not at all allow us to conclude to the validity of the corresponding transcendental principles, and therefore, to the possibility of a constitutive use of principles and ideas: neither with regard to things in themselves, about which we know nothing, nor with regard to nature understood as the whole of appearances, because the world as a whole is not the object of a possible experience for us, as the *Dialectic* has shown¹⁵⁰. This tension hints at a problem

¹⁴⁷ A 651 / B 679.

¹⁴⁸ A 648 / B 676.

¹⁴⁹ Gava, 2023, p. 159.

¹⁵⁰ According to Marcus Willaschek's reading, a further clarification is necessary: the distinction between a logical and a transcendental use of reason is not fully identifiable with that between a regulative and a constitutive use of reason. Their identification is ruled out by the fact that Kant claims that the logical principles presuppose that we assume the corresponding transcendental ones: if the two distinctions were

that Kant will fully face only in the later *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, namely that of the complex relationship between reason and nature: by the one hand, *reason* seems to prescribe its principles and laws to nature; coherently, as he claims in the second *Preface* of the *KrV*, “reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design”, and it must “compel nature to answer its questions”, “like an appointed judge who compels witnesses to answer the questions he puts to them”¹⁵¹. By the other hand, however, reason is compelled by its own *nature* to interpret transcendently the logical requirement expressed by its regulative principles and ideas. According to Gabriele Gava, who invokes Andrew Chignell’s proposal¹⁵², this transition from systematicity understood subjectively, i.e., referred to reason’s procedure, to systematicity understood objectively, i.e., referred to nature, can be interpreted as based on practical considerations, because the strategy for this transition might recall the strategy behind Kant’s justification of belief¹⁵³. Just as belief is ultimately justified on the basis of practical grounds (in short: if a proposition, whose truth is left undecided on the basis of theoretical considerations, identifies conditions that are necessary for the realization of the ends we are pursuing, then we are rationally required to *believe* that proposition), so is the assumption that nature itself is systematic: since “we would not be able to perfect our empirical cognition by following the logical requirement of systematicity if nature were not systematic”, therefore we are required to *believe* that nature is systematic. It is noteworthy that this claim does *not* amount to *cognition* or *knowledge*, and that the type of justification provided for it is practical and not theoretical, since it is based on the interest of reason in the epistemic end it is pursuing (i.e., systematicity of its cognitions); furthermore, the theoretical evidence in support of the systematicity of nature is clearly insufficient. This interpretative proposal seems to be able to account for the fact that reason is, in a certain

overlapping, we would therefore have to legitimate the use of constitutive principles of reason, which Kant denies. Furthermore, the identification is also incompatible with Kant’s claim that logical principles are merely “subjective” ones (i.e., they do not concern objects, but cognitions), while the regulative use of reason does concern objects and not merely cognitions, since it prescribes us to find order in nature and not just among our cognitions. According to Willaschek, therefore, the distinction between a logical and a transcendental use of principles expresses the question as to whether a principle is concerned only with our cognitions, in abstraction from their objects, or with the objects themselves. Furthermore, logical principles are prescriptive since they require us to investigate the hypotheses that follow from them; transcendental principles, instead, are descriptive, i.e., they claim to be a description of how objects are (cf. Willaschek, 2018, pp. 110-118).

¹⁵¹ B xiii.

¹⁵² Cf. Chignell, 2007, pp. 351-354.

¹⁵³ The role and the epistemic status of *Glaube* in Kant will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 3.

sense, led to a transition to transcendental principles; at the same, however, for the abovementioned reasons it does not, according to Gava, violate Kant's prohibition to take the principles constitutively, as other readings seem to suggest¹⁵⁴.

Considering these features, the regulative use of ideas can be seen as a valuable and irreplaceable contribution that metaphysical thinking provides to knowledge in general. The possibility of employing in a merely *regulative* way the principles of reason allows the latter to resolve conflicts that arise when these principles are considered as constitutive, thus as objective (i.e., referring to the "constitution of the object"). Regulative principles are, instead, subjective principles, insofar as they are "*maxims* of reason", i.e., "taken not from the constitution of the object but from the interest of reason in regard to a certain possible perfection of the cognition of this object": in this case, there is "not a true conflict, but it is merely a different interest of reason that causes a divorce between ways of thinking"¹⁵⁵. Therefore:

The ideas of pure reason can never be dialectical in themselves; rather it is merely their misuse which brings it about that a deceptive illusion arises out of them; for they are given as problems for us by the nature of our reason, and this highest court of appeals for all rights and claims of our speculation cannot possibly contain original deceptions and semblances. Presumably, therefore, *they have their good and purposive vocation* in regard to the natural predisposition of our reason.¹⁵⁶

In this respect, as Kant claims immediately after, the ideas of pure reason must have "the least objective validity¹⁵⁷, even if it is only an indeterminate one", so that they

¹⁵⁴ Gava, 2023, pp. 156-160. Cf. O'Shea, 1997, pp. 241–242 and Wartenberg, 1979, pp. 412-423.

¹⁵⁵ A 666 / B 694. More specifically, "reason has in fact only a single unified interest, and the conflict between its maxims is only a variation and a reciprocal limitation of the methods satisfying this interest": for this reason, "the interest in *manifoldness* (in accordance with the principle of specification) might hold more for *this* sophisticated reasoner, while *unity* (in accordance with the principle of aggregation) holds more for *that* one". Each of these reasoners will ground his judgment "solely on the greater or lesser attachment to one of the two principles, neither of which rests on any objective grounds, but only on the interest of reason, and that could better be called 'maxims' than 'principles'". However, if one considers "the constitution of the object", one understands that "it lies too deeply hidden for either of them to be able to speak from an insight into the nature of the object". Therefore: "these maxims can of course be united, but as long as they are held to be objective insights, they occasion not only conflicts but also hindrances that delay the discovery of the truth" (A 666-667 / B 694-695).

¹⁵⁶ A 669 / B 697, my emphasis.

¹⁵⁷ In the possible objective validity of the ideas of reason lies the possibility, ultimately, of their "deduction": the latter is regarded by Kant as "the completion of the critical business of pure reason", and as the task that he is here undertaking (A 670 / B 698). Gabriele Gava interprets the objective validity Kant attributes to the ideas of reason as an "*indirect* objective validity", meaning that "the ideas of reason are necessary for perfecting our capacity to obtain objective empirical cognitions through the understanding". Moreover, Gava also discusses an interpretative proposal by James O'Shea, who "takes the fact that the

do not “represent merely empty thought-entities [*Gedankenwesen*] (*entia rationis ratiocinantis*)”. In the case of ideas of reason, “something is given to my reason” not “as an object absolutely” (in which case concepts of the understanding can apply to the given “something”), but rather “only as an *object in the idea*”; in this case, there is “only a schema for which no object is given”. The objective reality of an idea of reason, therefore, does not consist “in the fact that it relates straightway to an object”; rather, that idea is only a schema for the concept of a thing in general, “ordered in accordance with the conditions of the greatest unity of reason” and “which serves only to preserve the greatest systematic unity in the empirical use of our reason”. This way, an object of experience is derived “from the imagined object of this idea as its ground or cause”¹⁵⁸. The use of the notion of a “schema”, as Claudio La Rocca observes, is not the paradigmatic one which is at work in the schematism chapter: in this case, the schema cannot be a “means of sensualisation [*Versinnlichung*]”¹⁵⁹, because no concepts of sensible objects are at stake; rather, an idea of reason represents a “standard [*Richtschnur*] of the empirical use of reason”¹⁶⁰. In La Rocca’s words, “the ideas act as regulative principles only through the fact that they refer to an imagined [*eingebildete*] object”. Put differently, ideas exhibit no objects, but rather “a regulative procedure [*Verfahren*]”¹⁶¹: the representation of an imagined object serves as an exhibition of a rule of reason, consisting in pursuing a heuristic principle. Therefore, regulative principles exercise their function precisely and only by means of this peculiar content.

Through their conception in analogy with schemata, the possibility of a “transcendental deduction of all the ideas of speculative reason”, which seemed at first to be impossible (unlike in the case of the categories), is now achievable if the ideas themselves are intended as regulative principles, and not as constitutive ones. This

ideas are necessary conditions for experience as guaranteeing that nature is in fact systematic”; according to Gava, however, this reading fails to avoid “making the idea of the systematicity of nature *constitutive*” (Gava, 2023, pp. 156-159).

¹⁵⁸ For this and previous quotations: A 669-670 / B 697-698. For an account of the objective reality peculiar to the ideas of reason, see Willaschek, 2018, pp. 107-118, 239-241.

¹⁵⁹ La Rocca, 2011, p. 31, my translation.

¹⁶⁰ A 675 / B 703.

¹⁶¹ For this and the previous quotation: La Rocca, 2011, pp. 31-33, my translation. Furthermore, La Rocca highlights Kant’s definition of the ideas of reason as “an analogue” of schemata (A 665 / B 693): in both cases, the function of a schema is to enable a process of “objectification”; but while in the case of schemata of sensibility what is to be “objectified” is a manifold stemming from sensibility, in the case of ideas of reason what should be “objectified” is a something that cannot at all, by its own definition, be an object, i.e., “a mere something in the idea” (A 679 / B 707) (La Rocca, 2011, p. 32, my translation).

deduction takes place by showing that it is a “necessary *maxim* of reason” to proceed in accordance with the three kinds of transcendental ideas: in fact, although they “cannot be referred directly to any object corresponding to them and to its *determination*”, nonetheless “all rules of the empirical use of reason under the presupposition of such an *object in the idea* lead to systematic unity”¹⁶². This presupposition takes the shape of an “as-if thought [*Als-Ob-Gedanke*]”¹⁶³: in Kant’s words, “reason cannot think this systematic unity in any other way than by giving its idea an object, which, however, cannot be given through any experience”; this “being of reason” is “taken as a ground only problematically”, i.e., “so as to regard all the connection of things in the world of sense *as if* they had their ground in this being of reason”, with the aim of grounding the systematic unity of reason¹⁶⁴.

In light of these considerations, the regulative use of the ideas and principles of reason seems to stand on a boundary: on the one hand it regulates our experience by leading us to the furthest limits of it, pointing towards a *focus imaginarium* which cannot in any way belong to it; on the other hand, it reminds us, precisely at the most decisive point, of our impossibility of overcoming those limits. As Günter Zöller points out, however, between the “full”, determinate (or determinable) space of phenomena and the “empty” space of noumena, “there runs a boundary, which itself has nature of a *space*: the border space [*der Grenzraum*]”¹⁶⁵. Speculative metaphysics moves along this border, unable neither to be satisfied with the domain of possible experience, nor to fully reach beyond it. Transcendental ideas of reason, in their regulative use, provide the determination of this *Grenzraum*¹⁶⁶, thus reason provides the determination of its own boundaries: in a word, the regulative use of transcendental ideas accomplishes the

¹⁶² For this and previous quotations: A 669-671 / B 697-699.

¹⁶³ La Rocca, 2011, p. 30, my translation.

¹⁶⁴ A 681 / B 709. This procedure is valid for each class of the ideas of reason: therefore, in psychology we will “connect all appearances, actions, and receptivity of our mind to the guiding thread of inner experience *as if* the mind were a simple substance that (at least in this life) persists in existence with personal identity”; in cosmology “we have to pursue the conditions of the inner as well as the outer appearances of nature through an investigation that will nowhere be completed, *as if* nature were infinite in itself and without a first or supreme member”; and in theology “we have to consider everything that might ever belong to the context of possible experience [...] *as if* the sum total of all appearances [...] had a single supreme and all-sufficient ground outside its range, namely an independent, original, and creative reason” (A 672 / B 700).

¹⁶⁵ Zöller, 2011, p. 24, my translation.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. AA 04:353.

“*Grenzbestimmung der reinen Vernunft*”¹⁶⁷, in which lies the highest purpose of (speculative) metaphysics and the very essence of the critical task. This determination, however, does not result in a complete renunciation to strive for beyond: although “empty” for (our) theoretical reason, the domain of things in themselves retains its reality *in itself*, not only for the eventual possibility to access this domain with the means of practical reason, but also in a purely theoretical perspective. In Zöller’s words, “what is theoretically incognizable is here something at least thinkable, indeed something that must necessarily be contemplated on the basis of theoretical reasons”¹⁶⁸. In the final analysis, therefore, the very essence of Kantian metaphysics lies not only in constantly leaning towards its limit, but also in laboriously drawing its own boundaries: an activity that reason carries out *auf der Grenze*, i.e., on the boundary space itself. At the heart of this activity lies the fundamental, critical consciousness of the finitude of human knowledge: at the same time, however, given the impossibility to determine the domain of a possible experience from within, this consciousness cannot be reached if not from the perspective of the border itself. Metaphysics is therefore a science that stands “*auf der Grenze der menschlichen Vernunft*”¹⁶⁹: in its possibility to determine its boundaries, our finite reason finds a hint of its transcendent, superior destination. Once again quoting Heidegger’s words, “finitude is centered in transcendence”¹⁷⁰, and “transcendence is, in truth, finitude itself”¹⁷¹.

¹⁶⁷ This expression is used by Kant in the title of §57 of *Prolegomena*, AA 04:350. Cf. AA 04:353, 365. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Kant employs the term *Grenze*, and not the term *Schranke*: while *Grenzen* “always presuppose a space that is found outside a certain fixed location, and that encloses that location”, *Schranken* “require nothing of the kind, but are mere negations that affect a magnitude insofar as it does not possess absolute completeness”. While in mathematics and natural science “human reason recognizes limits [*Schranken*] but not boundaries [*Grenzen*]”, metaphysics “does lead us to the boundaries”: more specifically, “transcendental ideas, just because they cannot be avoided and yet will never be realized, serve not only actually to show us the boundaries of reason’s pure use, but also to show us the way to determine such boundaries; and that too is the end and use of this natural predisposition of our reason” (AA 04:352-353).

¹⁶⁸ Zöller, 2011, p. 26, my translation.

¹⁶⁹ Ivi, p. 14.

¹⁷⁰ Heidegger, 1962, p. 106.

¹⁷¹ Ivi, p. 96.

Chapter 3

Beyond the limit: *Fürwahrhalten* and forms of assent

Thus let your opponent speak only reason, and fight him solely with weapons of reason. For the rest, do not worry about the good cause (of practical reason), for that never comes into play in a merely speculative dispute. In this case the dispute reveals nothing but a certain antinomy of reason, which, since it depends upon its nature, must necessarily be heard and examined. The conflict cultivates reason by the consideration of its objects 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*.¹

But now there enters *the right* of reason's *need*, as a subjective ground for presupposing and assuming something which reason may not presume to know through objective grounds; and consequently for *orienting* itself in thinking, solely through reason's own need, in that immeasurable space of the supersensible, which for us is filled with dark night.²

The analysis of Kant's critical transformation of speculative metaphysics has, up to now, resulted in the following outcomes: firstly, the possibility for metaphysics to obtain knowledge is restricted to a "complete estimation of synthetic *a priori* cognition"³, in the form of transcendental philosophy; as seen, part of this science is carried out in the *KrV* itself (an account of the concepts and principles constitutive of any cognition), while its completion is destined by Kant to a section of his planned metaphysical system. In the second place, the exploration of the destiny Kant envisions for former *metaphysica specialis* has led us towards the very boundaries of theoretical reason, locating us in a space within which the possibility of *thinking*, even if not *knowing*, super-sensible entities has taken the shape of a promising and legitimate regulative use of the ideas of reason. This privileged, but risky, vantage point has brought us *auf der Grenze* of metaphysics, and thus of theoretical reason itself, in its never-ending attempt to "get beyond the boundaries [*über die Grenze*] of possible experience"⁴: through its natural predisposition, reason leads us to the extreme limits of the latter, hinting at the super-sensible, and allows

¹ A 744-745 / B 772-773.

² AA 08:137.

³ A 13-14 / B 27-28.

⁴ B xix.

us to reach this privileged perspective over the “empty” space of noumena; at the same time, however, after the critical enterprise, it is constantly reminded that its claims of knowledge are doomed to tumble whenever they venture into this domain. Speculative metaphysics, in its *negative* utility (which is also, in certain sense, absolutely *positive*⁵), has therefore “made room” for a practical extension of the epistemic limitation of human reason: even though “speculative reason”, because of its impossibility to obtain cognition in the field of noumena, “has been denied all advance in this field of the supersensible” and had to leave that domain “empty”, it has nonetheless provided metaphysics as a whole with the possibility of this very scope, to then be filled with “practical data of reason”⁶.

However, as in the case of regulative ideas of reason, further possibilities for theoretical reason itself seem to have emerged: as seen, once metaphysics abandons its unwarranted claims of knowledge, there remain for it possibilities of *alternative* forms of investigation, not amounting to cognition nor knowledge, but still legitimate and valuable as long as well conscious of their own status. To account for this idea, this final chapter of the present work will be dedicated to the exploration of alternative epistemic modalities with respect to knowledge, opened up by Kant’s discussion of the concept of *Fürwahrhalten* in the *Canon of Pure Reason*. In other words, the possibility of a widening of the epistemic limits through the consideration of forms of theoretical assent which differ from knowledge will be surveyed.

3.1 Expanding the boundaries: alternative epistemic attitudes

In the *Preface* to the second edition of the *KrV*, Kant famously stated that he “had to deny [*aufheben*] knowledge [*Wissen*] in order to make room for faith [*Glauben*]”⁷; even starker is his quoted-above statement in the *Discipline of Pure Reason*, where he speaks of the possibility, even though one must “surrender [*aufgeben*]” the “language [*Sprache*]” of knowledge (*Wissen*), to “speak the language, justified by the sharpest reason, of a firm

⁵ Cf. B xxiv. Though at first glance the utility of a “purified” metaphysics might seem merely *negative*, consisting in “teaching us never to venture with speculative reason beyond the boundaries of experience”, this is just “its first usefulness”: indeed, “this utility soon becomes *positive*” because “it simultaneously removes an obstacle that limits or even threatens to wipe out the practical use of reason”, which must “be made secure against any counteraction” from speculative reason (B xxiv-xxv).

⁶ B xxi-xxii.

⁷ B xxx.

belief [*eines festen Glaubens*]”. Indeed, “what is here in dispute is not the *matter* [*die Sache*] but the *tone* [*der Ton*]”⁸: i.e., what is at stake in the forthcoming discussion is not the object of cognition, but the “language” through which we can approach it, the appropriate *epistemic modality* in which we can legitimately refer to it.

These clues suggest the possibility of arguing that despite the crucial theoretical limitation of our faculties, which compels them to forsake their claims to knowledge with respect to what lies beyond the limit of possible experience, nevertheless theoretical reason is *not* compelled to renounce *every* form of assent in relation to that domain. In the latter, certainly, a practical extension is expected: it is possible, however, that theoretical reason itself might still present some resources at its disposal with which it might turn towards the super-sensible while still remaining rational, i.e., respecting the epistemic limits it has laboriously drawn through the work of critique.

The scope of knowledge, inevitably constrained although now firmly secured, is indeed unable to satisfy the metaphysical urge of human reason, neither it exhausts the modalities through which reason can relate to a certain subject matter; put differently, there could be a more appropriate language or “tone” (*Ton*) to refer to a same content (*Sache*): such content might not be accessible by the strive for *Wissen* of theoretical reason, but still be, in a certain sense, available through *Glauben*.

In the third section of the *Canon of Pure Reason*, whose title is precisely “*On having an opinion, knowing, and believing*”, Kant introduces the discussion of the concept of *Fürwahrhalten* (“holding to be true”, or “holding-for-true”) as the fundamental positive epistemic attitude of a subject towards an epistemic content: it is presented as genus to which various epistemic modalities belong, including knowledge and faith or belief. The deepening into the epistemic status of propositional attitudes, as Luca Fomesu notices, might be motivated by “the attempt to reintroduce ancient subjects of the *metaphysica specialis*, i.e. God’s existence and soul’s immortality, through a particular notion of faith”⁹, even though, of course, renouncing proper knowledge. This idea seems to be confirmed by the context of the passage here at hand: in the first section of the *Canon*, Kant identifies “the final aim [*die Endabsicht*] to which in the end the speculation of reason in its transcendental use is directed” with “three objects”: the freedom of the

⁸ For this and the previous quotation: A 744-745 / B 772-773.

⁹ Fomesu, 2015, p. 367.

will (*die Freiheit des Willens*), the immortality of the soul (*die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*) and the existence of God (*das Dasein Gottes*)¹⁰; and “the entire armament of reason” in pure philosophy “is in fact directed only at the three problems that have been mentioned”¹¹. However, since the problem of (transcendental) freedom does not itself belong to reason in its practical use (because it “concerns merely speculative knowledge”), and since, in the overall project of the *KrV*, the *Canon* was conceived as the practical part of the critical system, in it “we are concerned with only two questions that pertain to the practical interest of pure reason”: “is there a God? Is there a future life?”¹². It is precisely with regard to the latter, considered (jointly with the freedom of the will) the “final aim” of reason, that the necessity to identify alternative epistemic modes arises: as is evident, these entities, although unknowable by definition, can in no way be ruled out as something purely chimerical¹³; indeed, they must be preserved from the “devastations” caused by the pretensions to knowledge of a “lawless speculative reason”¹⁴.

The third chapter of the present work will therefore have the role of providing an analysis of Kant’s account of holding-for-true, as an investigation into possible epistemic attitudes by a subject toward a certain content: as the abovementioned context makes clear, this inquiry is in reality motivated by the more fundamental attempt to identify the proper epistemic mode through which we can refer to the contents of the “final aim” of reason in its speculation¹⁵. The inner distinctions of *Fürwahrhalten*, namely *Meinen*,

¹⁰ A 798 / B 826.

¹¹ A 800 / B 828.

¹² A 803 / B 832.

¹³ As argued by Gabriele Gava, “the critique cannot be content with proving that God and immortality are possible or theoretically undecidable”: the main line of argument will be that fundamental moral principles “require a commitment to the existence of God and immortality”, so that “within metaphysics as a whole, there is space to accommodate that commitment without endangering the results of the ‘negative’ side of the critique”. The appropriate epistemic form taken up by this commitment is precisely that of belief as a particular mode of *Fürwahrhalten*, the latter being a pillar of the ‘positive’ part of the *KrV*, consisting in “establishing that metaphysics can achieve ‘architectonic unity’” (Gava, 2023, pp. 207-209). Even though the accent is here mainly on *moral* belief as a rational extension of reason, still it can be said in an important sense that *doctrinal* belief plays a significant role in the overall picture of the positive strand of the *KrV*, which is now to be explored (see Section 3.3).

¹⁴ A 849 / B 877.

¹⁵ In more detail, according to Fonnesu, the fundamental question at stake here is the justification of moral faith. To provide support for this idea, he shows that all the other three occurrences in the published works of the term “*Fürwahrhalten*” are concerned with the question of moral faith. The first is in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, at the end of the *Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason*, after the exposition of the postulates of God’s existence and of the immortality of the soul, where he tries to justify moral faith as grounded on a “need” of pure reason (cf. AA 05:142-146). The others take place in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, after the presentation of the “moral proof” of the existence of God, whose acceptance Kant

Wissen and *Glauben*, will be explored, together with the notions of objective sufficiency and subjective sufficiency (and their opposites), which Kant employs in view of a clarification of the aforesaid modes of assent. Since “in the transcendental use of reason [...] to have an opinion [*Meinen*] is of course too little, but to know [*Wissen*] is also too much”, the most relevant and appealing “stage” of holding-for-true in this field will be *Glauben*: to its analysis the next sections will be dedicated.

In more detail, the role of *doktrinaler Glaube* (as a mode of *Glauben*) will be explored in the view of its possibly being the further resource which is needed in the investigation of theoretical issues with respect to which knowledge is in principle precluded to us: the possibility to consider doctrinal belief as an outcome of a non-epistemic justification, capable of filling the objective insufficiency of its grounds, will be examined. Furthermore, the epistemic mode of doctrinal faith will be related and compared with the regulative use of ideas of reason, in the attempt to highlight a possible overlap of scopes in which such modes are implemented. In the very last place, it will be shown how the possibility of an extension of reason beyond the limits of possible experience does not end with the transition to the practical domain, but provides resources intrinsic to the theoretical domain itself: in this sense, a possible relationship between the scope of doctrinal faith and the additional level, later elaborated by Kant in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in which the reflective judgment will be located, will be only hinted at, to be eventually explored further.

3.2 *Fürwahrhalten* and forms of assent

Taking something to be true [*das Fürwahrhalten*] is an occurrence [*Begebenheit*] in our understanding that may rest on objective grounds [*auf objektive Gründen*], but that also requires subjective causes [*subjektive Ursachen*] in the mind of him who judges. If it is valid for everyone merely as long as he has reason, then its ground is objectively sufficient [*objektiv hinreichend*], and in that case taking

tries to justify, also offering a new and different version of the taxonomy of *Fürwahrhalten* presented in the *KrV* (cf. AA 05:429-482) (cf. Fonnesu, 2015, pp. 366-367). According to Lorenzo Miletì Nardo, however, although mainly adopted to discuss topics related to moral faith, the holding-for-true can find a fruitful employment in many other fields of gnoseology: e.g., in the topic of probable and heuristic knowledge, which is a matter of great relevance in the Kantian account of the epistemic status of empirical sciences (cf. Miletì Nardo, 2021, pp. 15-16).

something to be true is called *conviction* [*Überzeugung*]. If it has its ground only in the particular constitution of the subject, then it is called *persuasion* [*Überredung*].¹⁶

Judging from Kant's opening words, the shift of perspective brought about in this third section of the *Canon* is immediately noteworthy: from the discussion of “the ideal of the highest good, as a determining ground of the ultimate end of pure reason”¹⁷, Kant switches to an epistemic perspective to discuss *Fürwahrhalten* as a positive attitude held by an epistemic subject towards a certain propositional content, consisting in taking the latter to truly represent some state of affairs¹⁸. What is here at stake is not a judgment representing an object or state of affairs, but rather, in a certain sense, the mental act or state of the judging subject himself, entailing the latter's considering the propositional content of the judgment to be true. Indeed, by “*Fürwahrhalten*”, Kant understands an “occurrence”, an event taking place in a subject's understanding when he judges a certain content to correspond to truth. In other words, the holding-for-true is “the subjective validity of judgment [*die subjektive Gültigkeit des Urteils*], in relation to conviction [*Überzeugung*] (which at the same time is valid objectively)”¹⁹. For these reasons, *Fürwahrhalten* can be regarded, in contemporary terms, as a form of assent, a “basic epistemic notion” expressing “an attitude of the mind, a mental act which has subjective causes or roots”²⁰. According to Willaschek and Watkins's analysis, the distinctive feature of assent is the fact that it involves *both* an attitude towards a judgment *and* an assessment of the grounds (*Gründe*) that would support such attitude. Depending on the grounds that one takes to justify the content of his assent, therefore, the *Fürwahrhalten* can take various forms, i.e., one can take something to be true in different ways²¹: in fact, as Andrew Chignell puts it, assent is “the most general category of positive attitude towards a proposition”, meaning by “positive attitude” a “willingness to take it on board, to take it to be true”, as the German term literally indicates²²; meaningfully, the verbal expression “*für wahr halten*” is the German rendering for the Latin “*pro vero habere*”,

¹⁶ A 820 / B 848.

¹⁷ A 804 / B 832.

¹⁸ Cf. Gava, 2019, p. 55.

¹⁹ A 822 / B 850, translation modified.

²⁰ Fonnesu, 2015, p. 368.

²¹ Willaschek & Watkins, 2020, p. 3206.

²² Chignell, 2007a, p. 35.

which was already central in Wolff’s doctrine of judgment²³. The holding-for-true is therefore “a vast rubric” under which various epistemic attitudes are brought, “ranging from *adopting as a working assumption* to *knowing with absolute certainty*”²⁴ and thus encompassing “weak opinions, hypothesis, practical acceptance, and even assumptions of various sorts”²⁵, no less than “hunches” and other “weakly-held opinions”²⁶. Given this characterization, it is evident that the initial temptation to think of Kantian *Fürwahrhalten* as the equivalent for the contemporary concept of “belief” is mistaken, because the former, being an “expansive concept”, is much broader than the latter²⁷.

As read above in the opening passage of the third section of the *Canon*, Kant introduces a pair of terms identifying two different types of holding-for-true: conviction (*Überzeugung*) and persuasion (*Überredung*). A *Fürwahrhalten* is said to be a conviction “if it is valid [*gültig*] for everyone [*für jedermann*] merely as long as he has reason”, since “its ground is objectively sufficient [*objektiv hinreichend*]”. A persuasion, instead, takes place when the *Fürwahrhalten* “has its ground [*Grund*] only in the particular constitution [*in der besonderen Beschaffenheit*] of the subject”. Kant illustrates the “touchstone [*Probierstein*]” through which it is possible to determine whether holding something for true is conviction or persuasion: this criterion is identified with “the possibility of communicating it [*die Möglichkeit, dasselbe mitzuteilen*] and finding it to be valid for the reason of every human being [*für jedes Menschen Vernunft gültig*] to take it to be true”. If this external possibility is held, then the *Fürwahrhalten* can be a conviction:

²³ Cf. Miletì Nardo, 2021, p. 21. In more detail, Miletì Nardo’s reconstruction reveals Wolff’s conception of *pro vero habere* as an intellectual act consisting in holding a certain cognition to be true. Through this concept, he had deepened the subjective dynamics inherent to certainty, shifting the focus of reflection from truth to the relationship that the epistemic subject entertains with truth (cf. *ibid.*). This shift is a fundamental acquisition taken up by Kant and assumed in the section under consideration. Kant’s account of *Fürwahrhalten*, as stressed by Gabriele Gava, might have been also influenced by Crusius: the latter conceived assent (in his words: *Vorwahrhalten*) as a form of belief “in a broad sense”: more specifically, belief was intended by him as assent with respect to a merely probable proposition that identifies conditions for the realization of certain of our ends. For these reasons, Gava argues, Crusius is “presumably the source of Kant’s claim that belief implies a certain ‘readiness to act’ on a proposition when the right circumstances arise”. Indeed, it was not exactly Kant to introduce the expression *Fürwahrhalten* in the German vocabulary, as Luca Fonnesu claimed (cf. Fonnesu, 2015, p. 365), since Crusius’s *Vorwahrhalten* is “just another spelling of the same word” (Gava, 2019, pp. 70-72).

²⁴ Chignell, 2007a, p. 35.

²⁵ Chignell, 2014, pp. 574-575.

²⁶ Chignell, 2007a, p. 37.

²⁷ Cf. *ivi*, pp. 35-37.

for in that case there is at least a presumption that the ground of the agreement [*Einstimmung*] of all judgments, regardless of the difference among the subjects, rests on the common ground [*gemeinschaftlichen Grunde*], namely the object, with which they therefore all agree [*zusammenstimmen*] and through which the truth of the judgment is proved [*beweisen werden*].²⁸

By contrast, persuasion has “mere private validity [*bloße Privatgültigkeit*]”²⁹, being a form of assent “whose grounds are not such that any rational agent who is conscious of them *ought* to assent”; these grounds, in fact, depend upon the “particular constitution” of the judging subject and lie solely in him: when communicated to others, they do not lead them to assent³⁰. Persuasion brings with it the erroneous consideration of the ground of the judgment, albeit only subjective, as objective: it rests on the “misunderstanding of a subjective ground or reason for an objective one”³¹. Therefore it is “a mere semblance [*ein bloßer Schein*]” and “cannot be communicated”, meaning that its (subjective) grounds do not produce the same effect (the holding-for-true itself) on others than that which is produced in the judging subject. In fact, a means for the subject to unmask persuasion is precisely the “experiment that one makes on the understanding of others”, consisting in verifying whether “the grounds that are valid for us have the same effect on the reason of others”: if it is not such, then the holding-for-true is mere persuasion. Coherently, “I can preserve persuasion for myself if I please to do so”, but “I cannot assert anything, i.e., pronounce it to be a judgment necessarily valid for everyone, except that which produces conviction”³².

3.2.1 Subjective/objective sufficiency/insufficiency

Kant proceeds to outline his taxonomy of *Fürwahrhalten* by distinguishing three different “stages [*Stufen*]” that it can assume when “in relation with conviction”: having an opinion, believing and knowing.

²⁸ For this and previous quotations: A 820-821 / B 848-849.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Pasternack, 2014, p. 47.

³¹ Fonnesu, 2015, p. 368.

³² A 820-822 / B 848-850.

Having an opinion [Meinen] is taking something to be true [Fürwahrhalten] with the consciousness [Bewußtsein] that it is subjectively as well as objectively insufficient [objektiv unzureichendes]. If taking something to be true is only subjectively sufficient [subjektiv zureichend] and is at the same time held to be objectively insufficient, then it is called *believing* [Glauben]. Finally, when taking something to be true is both subjectively and objectively sufficient it is called *knowing* [Wissen].³³

This categorization is sketched by Kant by means of the fundamental criterion of “sufficiency” (or “insufficiency”), which can be declined objectively or subjectively: in order to grasp the classification introduced by him, it is essential, first of all, to be equipped with an adequate understanding of this underlying distinction, delving into the notions of objective sufficiency or insufficiency and subjective sufficiency or insufficiency with respect to the grounds of an assent. Kant provides very little indication on this matter, referring to them as “readily grasped concepts”; the only guidance he gives is that “subjective sufficiency [Zulänglichkeit] is called *conviction* [Überzeugung] (for myself [für mich selbst]), objective sufficiency, *certainty* [Gewißheit] (for everyone [für jedermann])”³⁴. Due to the lack of further explicit definitions or indications by Kant, however, it is crucial to provide a brief clarification of these notions in order to be in the position to properly grasp his classification of forms of assent. As a premise, it should be pointed out that, as suggested by Leslie Stevenson, the distinction between objective and subjective sufficiency is one between two different conceptions or standards of epistemic justification³⁵.

To begin with, the criterion of *objective sufficiency* is an “epistemological concept”³⁶ slightly distinct from truth; rather, the latter, conceived as resting “upon

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ A 822 / B 850.

³⁵ Cf. Stevenson, 2011, p. 84. Stevenson also finds support for this reading in Kant’s essay *Was heißt sich im Denken orientieren?*: here he employs again the notions of subjective and objective sufficiency to distinguish believing, knowing and opining. “All believing is a holding true which is subjectively sufficient, but *consciously* regarded as objectively insufficient; thus it is contrasted with *knowing*. On the other hand, when something is held true on objective though consciously insufficient grounds, and hence is merely *opinion*, this *opining* can gradually be supplemented by the same kind of grounds and finally become a *knowing*” (AA 08:141). Kant’s insistence, confirmed in this essay, on the adverb “consciously” corroborates the thesis according to which “by ‘subjective’ and ‘objective sufficiency’ he means two quite different conceptions of justification” (Stevenson, 2011, p. 85). However, this account of objective and subjective sufficiency as two standards of *epistemic* justification is here assumed only provisionally: as Section 3.2.2 will make clear, in fact, the key to understanding the peculiarity of the form of assent of *Glauben* will lie precisely in grasping the *non-epistemic* nature of the grounds for its justification, requiring thereby a widening of the conception of subjective sufficiency so as to encompass non-epistemic grounds (cf. Chignell, 2007a, pp. 34, 50-58).

³⁶ Ivi, p. 80.

agreement with the object”³⁷, can be considered an important ground for objective sufficiency itself³⁸. As shown by Lawrence Pasternack’s analysis, objective sufficiency can be interpreted as a “high justificatory standard” from an epistemic point of view, which is realized only when objective grounds (*objektive Gründe*) in support for a certain judgment are provided. A first important objective ground, as just mentioned above, is the agreement between the judgment that makes up a ground in support of an assent and the corresponding object in intuition: in this correspondence, in fact, lies “the possibility of communicating” the *Fürwahrhalten*³⁹. In addition to “empirical evidence”, however, objective grounds can include also “testimony, rational demonstration, and other epistemic warrants used in support of a claim”⁴⁰. Stevenson suggests interpreting Kant’s notion of objective sufficiency in light of the contemporary epistemological concept of justification, i.e., “reason or evidence that reaches some publicly shared standard of good enough reason to believe the relevant claims”⁴¹. Being this requirement particularly high-demanding, the only form of assent that fully satisfies the criterion of objective sufficiency is knowledge. The case in which, by contrast, this standard is not met can be characterized as one of *objective insufficiency*.

The second notion employed in this classification is *subjective sufficiency*: Stevenson suggests rendering it as indicating one’s thought of having objective sufficiency, that is, of being justified in holding the relevant proposition to be true⁴². Pasternack’s interpretation, however, differs in a crucial aspect, because of which it renders the criterion more demanding: according to him, subjective sufficiency describes “the psychological state of *firmly* holding a proposition to be true”⁴³. He points out that Kant cites subjective sufficiency only when the assent at stake is characterized by a

³⁷ A 820 / B 848. Kant assumes a “correspondence account of truth as the agreement of a judgment with the relevant facts” (Stevenson, 2011, p. 80). In the *Introduction to the Transcendental Logic*, Kant had admitted as “granted and presupposed” the “nominal definition of truth, namely that it is the agreement of cognition with its object” (A 58 / B 82).

³⁸ Furthermore, vice versa, agreement between the judgments of many understandings is for sure a “touchstone” for truth, but it is “fallible”, since “others might agree or disagree for bad reasons [...] such as politeness, credulity, ignorance, shortsightedness, prejudice, or sheer cussedness” (Stevenson, 2011, p. 80). Agreement between judging subjects is not, therefore, an absolute warranty of truth.

³⁹ A 820 / B 848.

⁴⁰ Pasternack, 2014, p. 43.

⁴¹ Stevenson, 2011, p. 82. Chignell’s account of justification employs rather different terms, defining it as “the evaluative concept that specifies conditions under which a propositional attitude is rationally acceptable with a moderate-to-high degree of confidence” (Chignell, 2007a, p. 33).

⁴² Cf. Stevenson, 2011, p. 82.

⁴³ Pasternack, 2014, p. 43.

“firmness [*Festigkeit*]”⁴⁴ which is brought about either by objectively sufficient grounds (as in the case of knowledge) or by subjective grounds that “gain their authority through the ‘needs’ of pure practical reason”. Kant seems therefore to restrict proper subjective sufficiency to cases of “justified firm assent”, i.e., “cases he regards as either epistemically or practically justified”⁴⁵. There are some instances, on the other hand, in which merely “subjective causes [*subjektive Ursache*]”⁴⁶ do not yield subjective sufficiency: these can lead to illicit forms of firm assent, e.g., those stemming from “wishful thinking” or “peer pressure” and giving rise to “error and illusion”⁴⁷; for these cases, however, Kant does not employ the notion of subjective sufficiency. It seems therefore that *Fürwahrhalten*, from a subjective point of view, can be the product of either legitimate or illicit subjective causes, but only in the former case the criterion of subjective sufficiency is met. Illicit subjective causes can nevertheless produce instances of firm assent, which, albeit, do not comply with this requirement, i.e., are subjectively insufficient. Subjective insufficiency can therefore stem either from cases of illicit *Fürwahrhalten*, or from scenarios in which the subjective causes in support of assent are not powerful enough to provide it⁴⁸.

Thomas Höwing offers a rigorous definition of both objective and subjective sufficiency which helps clarifying the potential obscurity arising from the lack of a proper explanation of these notions by Kant himself. These two criteria refer to “the domain of grounds that make an assent rationally appropriate for an agent”. To grasp these definitions, the following preliminary assumption must be made: “there is some state or fact, *g*, and some agent, *S*, such that *g* makes an assent that *p* rationally appropriate for *S*”. With reference to this scenario, a first distinction can be made: either it is true that *g* rationally requires *S* to assent that *p*, or it is false. In the former case, *g* is *subjectively sufficient* with respect to *S*’s assent that *p*; in the latter, instead, *g* is *subjectively insufficient* with respect to *S*’s assent that *p*. A second distinction enables us to determine

⁴⁴ A 827 / B 855.

⁴⁵ Pasternack, 2014, p. 44.

⁴⁶ A 820-822 / B 848-850. Pasternack notes therefore that “although objective grounds amass to yield objective sufficiency, the same relation does not hold between subjective grounds and subjective sufficiency”: some merely subjective causes, in fact, can lead to illicit forms of assent (Pasternack, 2014, p. 44).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Cf. *ivi*, p. 45. If these cases are accompanied by “consciousness [*Bewußtsein*]” of this insufficiency, then they can be described as cases of *Meinen*, i.e., having an opinion (cf. A 822 / B 850), consisting “in a more tentative or provisional assent” (Pasternack, 2014, p. 45).

the objective sufficiency of a ground, i.e., “whether g requires every rational agent to whom it is available to assent that p ”: it is either true or false that “necessarily, for any rational agent x , if g is available to x then g rationally requires x to assent that p ”. If it is true, then g is *objectively sufficient* with respect to an assent that p ; whereas if it is false, then g is *objectively insufficient*. Consequently, the definitions of objective sufficiency (“OS”) and subjective sufficiency (“SS”) provided by Höwing’s interpretation resonate as follows:

(OS) A state or fact g counts as an *objectively sufficient ground* with regard to an assent that p iff [if and only if] necessarily, for any rational agent x , if g is available to x then g rationally requires x to assent that p .

(SS) A state or fact g counts as a *subjectively sufficient ground* with regard to a particular agent S ’s assent that p iff g rationally requires S to assent that p .⁴⁹

Andrew Chignell’s interpretation also provides insightful considerations. According to it, an *objective ground* in support of a *Fürwahrhalten* amounting to *Wissen* presents the following features: first of all, it provides reliable information regarding the object or state of affairs described by the judgment that is held for true; secondly, it is “intersubjectively valid” and “communicable”, meaning that it is “something that any rational inquirer in the same situation could take to be indicative of the truth of the assent”. If the objective ground is sufficient, in the third place, it indicates to a moderate-to-high degree that the proposition is true; and, fourthly, it does “not only license but also necessitate firm assent”. Lastly, Chignell identifies as potential objective grounds not only empirical evidence, but also “perceptual, memorial, and introspective states”, as well as “other sufficient assents we already hold”⁵⁰. On the other hand, *subjective causes* or *grounds* for an assent “have to do with ‘internal’ processes by which a person comes to

⁴⁹ For this and previous quotations: Höwing, 2016, pp. 216-219.

⁵⁰ For this and previous quotations: Chignell, 2007b, pp. 326-327. As examples of “other sufficient assents we already hold”, Chignell mentions “results of inductive and deductive arguments”, “assents about what others have testified”, and “assents about one’s experiences” (ibid.; cf. Chignell, 2007a, p. 41). Furthermore, he supports his reconstruction of what can function as an objective ground also with passages from the Jäsche lectures on logic, where Kant seems to distinguish between two types of assent according to the kind of ground that supports it: “Holding-to-be-true based on a ground of cognition that is objectively as well as subjectively sufficient, or certainty, is either *empirical* or *rational*, accordingly as it is grounded either on *experience* – one’s own as well as that communicated by others – or on *reason*. This distinction relates, then, to the two sources from which the whole of our cognition is drawn: *experience* and *reason*” (AA 09:70).

hold an assent”⁵¹. However tempting it may be to simply identify an appropriate subjective ground with “the subject’s own recognition that his assent is based on sufficient objective grounds”, some more precise requirements must actually be added: for a subjective ground to be sufficient would demand the subject to be “in a position to cite what he takes to be his sufficient objective grounds”; not only, it would demand from the subject that “he also *would* cite those grounds if he were to reflect”⁵². These two requirements must both be met in order to obtain a subjectively sufficient ground or cause. Coherently, Chignell provides the following definitions (employing the same variables as those that Höwing will then refer to) of objective and subjective sufficiency with reference to an assent that *p*:

S’s assent that *p* is objectively sufficient if and only if ($\exists g_1$) such that

- (i) g_1 is a ground that S has, and
- (ii) g_1 is a sufficient objective ground for assenting to *p*.

S’s assent that *p* is subjectively sufficient if and only if ($\exists g_2$) such that

- (i) g_2 is a ground that S has,
- (ii) S’s assent is based on g_2 , and
- (iii) on reflection, S would cite g_2 as the sufficient objective ground for his assent.⁵³

This reconstruction of the two principles shows that, in cases where $g_1 = g_2$ – i.e., where the grounds that make the assent objectively sufficient are also those on which S bases his assent and that he would, “on reflection”, cite as his sufficient grounds –, the assent is well founded, meaning that it will amount to knowledge. Entirely different scenarios, however, are possible: S might have a subjectively sufficient assent which is not objectively sufficient as well (this would amount to *Glauben*, or, if S mistook his insufficient objective ground for a sufficient one, it would cause *Überredung*); or S might have an assent that is both subjectively and objectively sufficient, but according to different grounds, so that $g_1 \neq g_2$: this would be, too, a case of persuasion, since the grounds S *would cite* as sufficient objective grounds (therefore: S’s subjective grounds)

⁵¹ Chignell, 2007a, p. 44.

⁵² For this and previous quotations: *ivi*, pp. 44-47.

⁵³ Chignell, 2007b, p. 329.

for holding a proposition for true would not be the objectively sufficient ones (which though would be available), but others (e.g., wishful thinking)⁵⁴.

3.2.2 *Meinen, Wissen and Glauben*

Thanks to an elucidation of the parameters employed to distinguish the three levels of *Fürwahrhalten*, namely the objective and subjective sufficiency or insufficiency of the grounds in support of it, it is now possible to better understand Kant's "opinion-knowledge-belief triad"⁵⁵, together with the peculiar characterization he provides for each component. In general, it seems possible to maintain that the very idea of an assent is linked, at least, to that of a subjective "cause [*Ursache*]" or ground for it: in fact, "while *some* assents have an objective ground, *every* assent has a subjective" one⁵⁶.

First of all, as Fonnesu points out, Kant has a positive conception of *Meinen*: albeit "problematic", this epistemic attitude is not completely "arbitrary", because it has "some connection to truth, and the law of this connection has to be certain"⁵⁷. Having an opinion shares with persuasion its insufficiency, but unlike the latter, the former does not entail a misunderstanding of its epistemic status, since it involves awareness of this insufficiency, as becomes clear from Kant's expression "*mit Bewußtsein*". Firmly holding this awareness, *Meinen*, although "insufficient", "can still be rationally held under the right circumstances". Chignell considers as a valid example of this kind of *Fürwahrhalten* the case of a scientist taking on board a working hypothesis "in order to see whether she can find confirming or disconfirming evidence for it": since "she is not mistakenly taking

⁵⁴ Cf. Chignell, 2007a, pp. 47-48. Chignell employs the following example to clarify this case: "a judge is presiding over a case which involves a good friend of his. The evidence that he hears is mixed, but on the whole it points towards the guilt of his friend. The judge, swayed by his friendship with the defendant, takes himself (wrongly) to have an objectively good ground for thinking that his friend is innocent, and he cites that ground in rendering his decision. Given that the evidence is mixed, it's true that the judge has *some* ground for holding that his friend is innocent, but it is not in fact objectively sufficient given all of the evidence at his disposal. Still, the assent is subjectively sufficient [...], since the judge holds his assent on the basis of evidence that he has, and he would, on reflection, cite that evidence as sufficient for assenting as he does. This citation would be mistaken, of course, since we've stipulated that his ground is not sufficient for his assent. [...] Thus, the judge is persuaded that his friend is innocent but doesn't know that he is" (ibid.).

⁵⁵ Pasternack, 2011, p. 292.

⁵⁶ Chignell, 2007a, p. 39. Cf. *ivi*, p. 44. Not every assent, however, is subjectively sufficient, since the subjective causes or grounds in support of it might be insufficient (as in the case of opinion).

⁵⁷ Fonnesu, 2015, p. 373.

some faulty ground [...] to be objectively sufficient”, she cannot be said to be *persuaded* of her hypothesis, but rather she “openly admits” her lack of objective sufficiency, therefore being the latter also subjectively so⁵⁸. According to this brief account, it is possible to rigorously define this epistemic attitude, with reference to the terminology employed above. In the case of *Meinen*:

g qualifies as *subjectively and objectively insufficient* with respect to S’s assent that *p*. In other words, *g* does not rationally require S to assent that *p*, and *g* does not require every rational agent to whom it is available to assent that *p*. Recall, however, that we are assuming that *g* makes it rationally appropriate for S to assent that *p*. If this is taken into account, we may say that [...] *g* counts as a *ground of opinion* with respect to S’s assent that *p*.⁵⁹

Having an opinion, however, “is not allowed at all” when it comes to “judging from pure reason”, since in this field “everything that is necessary should be cognized *a priori*”, therefore requiring “universality and necessity”. For this reason, it is evidently “absurd” and useless to have an opinion in mathematics, and the same situation holds for the “principles of morality”⁶⁰. In the field of the *a priori*, stemming from pure reason alone, only knowledge (*Wissen*) is an appropriate epistemic attitude, due to its both objective and subjective sufficiency: since being necessary and universal, it is an objectively valid holding-for-true, and it possesses the fundamental feature of communicability⁶¹. As Willaschek and Watkins’s analysis points out, knowledge for Kant is a holding-for-true which requires a kind of justification such that it guarantees truth. More specifically, the following criteria must be met to obtain proper knowledge: first of all, knowledge must be warranted; and secondly, “the degree of certainty provided by the kind of warrant” must be such that it “entails truth”⁶². This happens because the objective

⁵⁸ For this and previous quotations: Chignell, 2007b, p. 332.

⁵⁹ Höwing, 2016, p. 218.

⁶⁰ A 822-823 / B 850-851.

⁶¹ Cf. Fomesu, 2015, p. 374.

⁶² Willaschek and Watkins, 2020, p. 3208. Furthermore, these authors describe Kantian knowledge as a “close cousin” of the contemporary tripartite conception of knowledge, according to which it is conceived as warranted true belief: Kant’s notion, however, is more demanding since it entails certainty. The analysis of *Wissen* by these authors is functional to mark its distinction from *Erkenntnis* or cognition: by the one hand, cognition is “a conscious representation that is characterized by its representational content”, its “semantic features”, consisting in its successful reference to an objects, and its “object-involving character”; by the other hand, knowledge is a propositional attitude defined in terms of a particular kind of epistemic justification. This fundamental distinction allows us to grasp a significant consequence: by one side, we cannot have “any *substantive* knowledge of *specific* things in themselves”, because such knowledge claims would lack their objective justification, since the latter would require cognition of things

validity of the judgment, consisting in “finding it to be valid for the reason of every human being to take it to be true”, is grounded “on the common ground, namely the object, with which they therefore all agree and through which the truth of the judgment is proved”. Shortly before, in fact, Kant had recalled that truth “rests upon agreement with the object”: this agreement is therefore that which allows the concordance of “the judgments of every understanding” with respect to the object itself⁶³. Because of these features, therefore, in the case of *Wissen*:

g qualifies as *subjectively and objectively sufficient* with respect to S’s assent that *p*. In other words, *g* rationally requires S to assent that *p*, and *g* requires every rational agent to whom it is available to assent that *p*. [...], in such a case, *g* counts as a *ground of knowledge* with respect to S’s assent that *p*.⁶⁴

According to the analysis up to now conducted, it seems that Kant understands *Meinen* and *Wissen* as different grades on the same scale, so that, as Stevenson points out, “an accretion of evidence can convert one into the other”, i.e., can convert opinion into knowledge⁶⁵. In fact, the objective grounds in support of an opinion, although initially insufficient, “can amass to a level where they become objectively sufficient”, so that they provide enough warrant for knowledge. Alternatively, as happens for opinion, objective grounds can persist in being insufficient, but still be “salient to and supportive of a claim’s probability of being true”⁶⁶: this confirms Kant’s positive conception of *Meinen*, which, albeit objectively and subjectively insufficient, is accompanied by “consciousness [*Bewußtsein*]” of this insufficiency, which guarantees its distinction from *Überredung*. Considering Kant’s remark about the impossibility to have an opinion “in judging from pure reason”, it seems therefore that, compared to *Wissen*, *Meinen* would not have as its

in themselves. By the other side, however, “because knowledge is different from cognition”, we have *some* knowledge of things in themselves, e.g., we know that they are not spatio-temporal and that they exist, “two claims to which Kant is clearly committed”. These claims of knowledge are crucially different from any kind of knowledge justified on the basis of cognition: in fact, they are “independent of any particular cognition we might have” and its character can only be “generic”, pertaining to all things in themselves taken together, and not specific (ivi, pp. 3211-3212).

⁶³ For this and previous quotations: A 820-821 / B 848-849.

⁶⁴ Höwing, 2016, p. 218.

⁶⁵ Stevenson, 2011, p. 86.

⁶⁶ Pasternack, 2014, p. 43.

scope “all matters of possible knowledge (whether empirical or a priori)”⁶⁷, but rather would be restricted to the field delimited by empirical cognition.

The situation seems to be different in the case of *Glauben*, which is defined by Kant as a kind of assent (*Fürwahrhalten*) which is “only subjectively sufficient and is at the same time held to be objectively insufficient”⁶⁸. As a preliminary point, before discussing the peculiarity of Kantian belief, the width of the scope of this notion in Kant must be underlined. The extent and ambiguity⁶⁹ of the German term allow the full richness of this notion to be expressed in the original language, but pose various problems in translation. The noun “*Glaube*” can be translated into English as either “belief” or “faith”, and encompasses in itself both meanings, thereby making it somewhat challenging to discuss this epistemic attitude in English-speaking scholarship⁷⁰. As Chignell notes, the object of *Glauben* is not necessarily “something religious (e.g., God, the afterlife)”, as its translation with “faith” might suggest; furthermore, Kant’s discussion of *Glaube* considers different forms and varieties of it, that are irreducible to the more discussed “moral faith”. Since Kant’s use of this notion is strictly technical, as its account in the *Canon of Pure Reason* shows, and “has little to do with the everyday notion of ‘believe’”, Chignell’s suggestion to refer to it with a capital letter will be followed from now on to indicate its specificity⁷¹.

Drawing on the terminology employed above, consider Höwing’s systematization of the definition of *Glauben*: in the case of the latter,

g qualifies as *subjectively sufficient and objectively insufficient* with respect to S’s assent that *p*. In other words, *g* rationally requires S to assent that *p*, but *g* does not require every rational agent to whom it is available to assent that *p*. [...], in this case, *g* counts as a *ground of Belief* with respect to S’s assent that *p*.⁷²

⁶⁷ Stevenson, 2011, p. 87. Furthermore, it is important to note, as Andrew Chignell underlines, that although the domain of theoretical cognition (*Erkenntnis*) and that of knowledge (*Wissen*) are partially overlapping, they nonetheless remain distinct: while *Erkenntnis*, in the proper strict sense, is “the result of the combined activities of the understanding (concepts) and sensibility (intuitions) forming *a priori* and *a posteriori* judgments”, knowledge is such that it “can have its grounds in something other than cognition”. In other words, “not all knowledge is based in cognition” (Chignell, 2014, pp. 576-577).

⁶⁸ A 822 / B 850.

⁶⁹ As Luca Fonnesu points out, this “ambiguity” of the notion of *Glauben* is not only found in Kant: rather, it is widely present in his own sources, including Wolff, Meier, Crusius and Luther (cf. Fonnesu, 2020, p. 235).

⁷⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

⁷¹ Chignell, 2007b, p. 335.

⁷² Höwing, 2016, p. 218.

Sharing with opinion its objective insufficiency, but also with knowledge its subjective sufficiency, Belief seems to be an intermediate or hybrid form of assent between the other two⁷³. However, Belief does not seem to belong to “the same scale of theoretical justification” as the latter⁷⁴. In fact, the (subjective) sufficiency of *Glauben* does not stem from the subject’s acknowledgment of the objectively sufficient grounds for it, but from an alternative source. In other words: being a grade of *Fürwahrhalten* related to conviction, Belief must be a *justified* assent; but its justification cannot come from the subject’s assumption of objective grounds as grounds of his assent, since those objective grounds are insufficient by hypothesis. In the case of Belief, therefore, justification for the assent must have a different source of legitimation. Following Chignell’s insight, it could be said that for Kant justification or sufficiency can be either epistemic or non-epistemic:

An *epistemic concept* of justification sets out conditions under which a propositional attitude [i.e., an assent] is rationally acceptable with a moderate-to-high degree of confidence *and* a candidate (if true [...]) for knowledge. A *non-epistemic concept* of justification, by contrast, sets out conditions under which attitudes are rationally acceptable with a moderate-to-high degree of confidence but *not* candidates for knowledge (even if true).⁷⁵

Coherently, it seems that Kant would *not* accept a principle according to which “S is rational in assenting to a proposition *p* iff S has sufficient objective grounds for

⁷³ To account for an effective interpretation of the tripartite division *Meinen-Wissen-Glauben*, Thomas Höwing proposed to invoke a passage from the late Jäsche lectures on logic which provides an alternative account of the triad without relying on the objective/subjective sufficiency/insufficiency distinction. In that passage, Kant associates each epistemic modality with a modal mode of judgment: “there are *three kinds or modi* of holding-to-be-true: *opining, believing* and *knowing*. Opining is *problematic* judging. For what I merely opine I hold in judging, with consciousness, only to be problematic; what I believe I hold to be *assertoric*, but not as objectively necessary, only as subjectively so (holding only for me); what I *know*, finally, I hold to be *apodeictically certain*, i.e., to be universally and objectively necessary (holding for all), even granted that the object to which this certain holding-to-be-true relates should be a merely empirical truth. For this distinction in holding-to-be-true according to the three *modi* just named concerns only the *power of judgment* in regard to the subjective criteria for subsumption of a judgment under objective rules” (AA 09:66). In Höwing’s reading, the account of Belief here provided shows that the ground of justification for Belief emerges from “a combination of a lack of sufficient evidence and the decision to act in a certain way. On the one hand, the agent has access to certain facts that provide only insufficient evidence with regard to the truth of some proposition. On the other hand, she is required by these facts to assent to the proposition in question *given* that she has decided to act in a certain way”. For this reason, “the ground in question will require” *her* to assent to the proposition in question, “but it will not require everyone to whom it is available” to do the same. (Höwing, 2016, pp. 211-214).

⁷⁴ Stevenson, 2011, p. 86.

⁷⁵ Chignell, 2007a, pp. 33-34. The topic of non-epistemic justification will be furtherly explored in Section 3.3.1 in relation to doctrinal Belief.

assenting to *p*”: rather, he leaves room for assents that are not supported by sufficient objective grounds, but still “serve some other purpose for us”; assents, in other words, that serve *non-epistemic merits*. Even though the talk of “merits” is not present in Kant, Chignell usefully employs it to indicate the “property of an assent that makes it valuable or desirable for a particular subject to have it given her goals, interests, and needs”⁷⁶. While an epistemic merit (objective sufficiency and subjective sufficiency – as it is in the case of knowledge) of an assent makes it valuable or rationally acceptable because it indicates that it is probably true, a non-epistemic merit does so by way of other goals, interests or need of the subject. Furthermore, the scope of Belief is also different: while, as showed above, knowledge and opinion would operate within the field of “all matters of possible knowledge”, Belief “would have as its range the quite different set of topics [...] about which no knowledge is possible”⁷⁷. Kant introduces the specificity of the domain of *Glauben* by clearly stating that “in the transcendental use of reason, [...] to have an opinion is of course too little, but to know is also too much”⁷⁸. To understand what this domain might consist of, it is helpful to mention a passage from the later Jäsche lectures on logic:

Believing, or holding-to-be-true based on a ground that is objectively insufficient but subjectively sufficient, relates to objects in regard to which we not only cannot know anything but also cannot opine anything, indeed, cannot even pretend there is probability, but can only be certain that it is not contradictory to think of such objects as one does think of them.⁷⁹

Kant thus seems to indicate as distinctive of *Glauben* a field of application that lies beyond the epistemic limit of human reason, i.e., the boundaries within which it is possible to obtain proper knowledge, but that nonetheless, as this investigation has repeatedly concluded, retains its absolute legitimacy. As Kant himself explains:

Matters of belief are thus I) not objects of *empirical* cognition. [...] II) [N]or [are they] objects of cognition by reason (cognition *a priori*), whether theoretical, e.g., in mathematics and metaphysics, or practical, in morals. [...] III) The only objects that are matters of belief are those in which holding-to-be-

⁷⁶ Chignell, 2007a, pp. 50-51.

⁷⁷ Stevenson, 2011, p. 87.

⁷⁸ A 823 / B 851.

⁷⁹ AA 09:67.

true is necessarily free, i.e., is not determined through objective grounds of truth that are independent of the nature and the interest of the subject.⁸⁰

Accordingly: since not determined “through objective grounds of truth”, Belief is supported by subjectively sufficient causes. The subjective sufficiency of Belief is a merit that makes it more justified than opinion, which is insufficient both subjectively and objectively, but less justified than knowledge, which has, in addition, objective sufficiency; this “merit”, however, cannot be epistemic, since “its objects are outside the scope of anything that can be epistemically warranted either empirically or by theoretical reason”⁸¹.

In a merely speculative regard, therefore, we cannot judge at all here, for subjective grounds for taking something to be true, such as those that can produce belief, deserve no approval in speculative questions, where they neither remain free of all empirical assistance [*empirischen Beihülfe*] nor allow of being communicated [*mitteilen*] to others in equal measure.⁸²

In the scope of Belief, no “empirical assistance” or communicability is possible, and the “subjective grounds” in support of this *Fürwahrhalten* do not stem from theoretical sufficiency, i.e., epistemic merits. For this reason, “belief does not and cannot compete with knowledge”⁸³: first of all, its subjective sufficiency has as its source something other than epistemic merits; and secondly, its scope is by definition distinct from that of knowledge. To proceed in qualifying this crucial distinction between *Wissen* and *Glauben*, together with the specificity of the latter, it is vital to proceed in reading the passage under consideration:

Only in a *practical relation* [*in praktischer Beziehung*], however, can taking something that is theoretically insufficient to be true be called believing [*Glauben*]. This practical aim [*Absicht*] is either that of *skill* [*Geschicklichkeit*] or of *morality* [*Sittlichkeit*], the former for arbitrary [*beliebigen*] and contingent [*zufälligen*] ends, the latter, however, for absolutely necessary [*notwendigen*] ends [*Zwecke*].⁸⁴

⁸⁰ AA 09:68-70.

⁸¹ Pasternack, 2011, p. 295. See also the Jäsche logic, where Kant claims that “a belief of reason can never aim at theoretical cognition” (AA 09:69).

⁸² A 823 / B 851.

⁸³ Pasternack, 2011, p. 295.

⁸⁴ A 823 / B 851.

The source of justification for *Glauben* now begins to become clearer: as showed above, this source cannot lie in epistemic merits, because of the lack both of any empirical support and of communicability of Belief; rather, the justification for Belief comes from its subjective sufficiency, which consists in the link between the content of the assent and some “ends” of reason from a practical perspective. More specifically, by the one hand, these ends can be proposed arbitrarily and contingently, thus becoming the conditions for attaining them hypothetically necessary, and still subjectively sufficient for a subject, if, in the scenario, he does “not know of any other conditions at all under which the end could be attained”; by the other hand, the ends can be “absolutely necessary”, thus becoming the conditions for attaining them “sufficient absolutely and for everyone”, if the subject knows “with certainty that no one else can know of any other conditions that lead to the proposed end”⁸⁵. Both perspectives are practical, but while the first is related to skill, the second is involved in morality.

On the basis of the considerations developed so far, the propositional attitude of *Glauben*, following Pasternack’s schematic reconstruction, presents the following features:

- 1) is subjectively sufficient
- 2) is not objectively sufficient
- 3) applies only to propositions whose subject matter is not possibly within the scope of experience
- 4) applies only to propositions which cannot possibly be demonstrated through theoretical reason
- 5) is held solely from a practical point of view.⁸⁶

Pasternack, Chignell and Höwing’s approaches to Kantian Belief share the common attention to the non-epistemic nature of the grounds of justification of this kind of assent. From their accounts it emerges clearly that the sufficiency of an assent amounting to Belief is acquired through *non-epistemic* considerations, i.e., considerations which are relevant not (merely) from a theoretical perspective, but also (and mostly) from a *practical* point of view. These grounds of justification, although not based in theoretical evidence (since objectively insufficient), are nonetheless sufficient to make Belief

⁸⁵ A 823-824 / B 851-852.

⁸⁶ Pasternack, 2011, p. 296.

rational in particular contexts, i.e., depending on a particular end of the subject (which, in turn, as mentioned above, can be contingently or necessarily proposed)⁸⁷. The general term “end [*Absicht*]” is understood in a broad sense to include “speculative or moral ‘interests’ that human subjects have in the truth of certain propositions”, and “the ‘needs of reason’ that make certain assents desirable for us”⁸⁸: from this perspective, an assent is (subjectively) justified if it allows a subject to, at least partially, meet one of these goals or interests of his reason. If the grounds in support of an assent possess sufficient non-epistemic merits, then that assent is subjectively sufficient, i.e., it is (subjectively) justified.

Therefore: belief *per se*, when not combined with an end or interest of reason (in other words, *mere* belief), would not be rationally acceptable, due to the lack of support for it; but the particular subjective grounds or causes that support it are such that they connect the assent with some end of reason, rendering the assent itself justified and rationally acceptable. Depending on the nature of these ends, different types of *Glauben* will emerge.

3.3 *Doktrinaler Glaube: beyond the epistemic limits*

After discussing various possibilities of epistemic attitude, which complete the picture when compared to knowledge alone, one might ask whether, although “all synthetic cognition [*Erkenntnis*] of pure *reason* in its speculative use is entirely impossible”, Belief might nonetheless be the form of assent capable, firmly and justifiably, of procuring an orientation in metaphysical thinking *beyond* the limits of possible experience. To address this decisive question, it is necessary to consider the different forms of Belief brought about by Kant.

⁸⁷ As Chignell points out, in fact, the objective insufficiency Kant assigns to belief does not entail a denial of its “objectivity” in the sense of “being rationally acceptable for anyone in the subject’s position”. Accordingly, Chignell recognized two different senses of “objective” at work: the first is linked to experience (if not always direct, at least through some kind of connection to the object or state of affairs in question); a second sense is much broader and linked to intersubjective communicability, i.e., rational acceptability by “everyone in the assenting subject’s position”. Chignell claims that “Belief *is* objective in this broader sense, since it is such that anyone in the subject’s position could base that Belief on the same subjective grounds”. When Kant claims that belief is objectively insufficient, therefore, he does not deny that it is intersubjectively communicable: he simply means that it is “not based on grounds that provide sufficient evidence about an object” (Chignell, 2007b, pp. 336-337).

⁸⁸ Chignell, 2007b, pp. 333-334.

In the continuation of the section *On having an opinion, knowing, and believing*, in fact, Kant introduces three types of Belief: “pragmatic”, “doctrinal” and “moral”. After stating the difference between “subjectively” and “absolutely” necessary conditions to attaining an end, he addresses, first of all, *pragmatic Belief* by means of an example:

The doctor must do something for a sick person who is in danger, but he does not know [*kennt*] the illness. He looks to the symptoms [*Erscheinungen*], and judges, because he does not know of anything better, that it is consumption. His belief is merely contingent [*bloß zufällig*] even in his own judgment; someone else might perhaps do better. I call such contingent beliefs, which however ground [*zum Grunde liegt*] the actual use of the means to certain actions [*Handlungen*], pragmatic beliefs [*pragmatischen Glauben*].⁸⁹

This kind of *Glaube* represents a “merely contingent belief”, stemming from the “hypothetically necessary [*hypothetischnotwendig*]” conditions which are required to attain an “end [*Zweck*]” that has been “proposed [*vortgesetzt*]”⁹⁰. The end of healing the sick patient, in fact, is “hypothetically” and not “absolutely” necessary for the doctor, since he is not required to will it “simply as a rational agent”, but rather it is “appropriate to his circumstances, character and position”. Two conditions describe these circumstances: by one side, “he cannot claim to have knowledge of the patient’s malady”, but still, by the other side, he has to decisively prescribe a treatment, i.e., he is required to intervene in the most appropriate way possible in view of the proposed aim, namely to heal the patient. Given this scenario, the doctor “judges” about the nature of the patient’s illness: his assent to the judgment thus produced does not represent a case of *Meinen* (i.e., a weak assent lacking objective as well as subjective sufficiency), but rather is a *firm* assent, as required to achieve the proposed end. The doctor, in fact, “cannot rationally proceed with decisive treatment unless he firmly assents to a diagnosis”, even in the absence of sufficient objective grounds⁹¹. Pragmatic Belief, moreover, has a “degree

⁸⁹ A 824 / B 852. It should be noted that this example, despite what it might seem, does not create any real problems for the interpretation of Belief here provided (according to which it has to do with that about which it is not possible to obtain knowledge): in fact, Kant assumes for the sake of argument that *in that precise circumstance* the doctor “does not know the illness” and cannot modify this condition (ibid.).

⁹⁰ A 823 / B 851.

⁹¹ For this and previous quotations: Chignell, 2007b, p. 339. The justification for the doctor’s Belief in the content of his diagnosis comes from the combination of the acknowledgment of an epistemic insufficiency (he does not *know* the nature of the disease) with the non-epistemic ground represented by his necessity to act in a certain way to save the patient. In the Jäsche logic lectures, Kant provides another example of pragmatic Belief: “thus the businessman, for example, to strike a deal, needs not just to opine that there will

[*Grad*], which can be large or small according to the difference of the interest [*Interesse*] that is at stake”: a crucial “touchstone [*Proberstein*]” to determine this degree is represented by “betting [*Wetten*]”. In fact, the greater the interest at stake, the less one is willing to bet on the truth of a judgment in support of which the objective grounds are insufficient: the stakes make one begin to realize “it is quite possible that he has erred”, and what appeared to be Belief begins to waver, proving to be mere persuasion⁹².

Whereas the ends that reason sets for itself in the case of pragmatic Belief are “arbitrary and contingent”⁹³, when it comes to *moral Belief* the end is “inescapably fixed [*unumgänglich festgestellt*]”, because it is absolutely dictated by reason itself: “it is absolutely necessary [*schlechterdings notwendig*] that something must happen, namely, that I fulfill the moral law in all points”. Since both from *my* perspective and from that of *anyone else*⁹⁴ “there is possible only a single condition [*Bedingung*] under which this end is consistent with all ends together and thereby has practical validity”, and this condition is “that there be a God and a future world [*ein künftige Welt*]”, “I will inexorably believe [*glauben*] in the existence of God [*ein Dasein Gottes*] and a future life [*ein künftiges Leben*]”. These beliefs will never be “unstable [*wankend*]”, because without them “my moral principles themselves [...] would thereby be subverted”⁹⁵. The “certainty [*Gewißheit*]” of this “conviction [*Überzeugung*]” is not “logical”: in fact, “no one will ever be able to boast that he *knows* [*wisse*] that there is a God and a future life”; ironically, Kant adds that, if someone were able, that would be the man he has long sought. The conviction is rather “moral certainty”, meaning that “the belief in a God and another world

be something to be gained thereby, but to believe it, i.e., to have his opinion be sufficient for an undertaking into the uncertain” (AA 09:67-68). Although the businessman does not have sufficient objective evidence that the outcome of the deal will be beneficial, he still has to act in a certain way: “he has to make the deal or not to make the deal”; a mere opinion would not be enough for him to determine his decision, and he won’t be able to make the deal “unless he is firm in own mind about its benefit for the company”. Therefore, the businessman has to *believe* either the proposition that the deal will benefit him, or to the proposition that the deal will not be beneficial (Chignell, 2007b, pp. 339-340).

⁹² A 824-825 / B 852-853. The circumstances already change depending on whether at stake is “one ducat” or “ten”; if even “the happiness of our whole life” has to be wagered, it is much likely that “our triumphant judgment would quickly disappear” (ibid.).

⁹³ A 823 / B 851.

⁹⁴ In Chignell’s words, this counts as a subjectively sufficient ground not only for the subject of the assent himself, but also “for every moral agent in every circumstance”. Even though objectively insufficient, this assent can be said to be “objective” in a second, broader meaning of objectivity, according to which “Belief is objective [...] since it is such that anyone in the subject’s position could base that Belief on the same subjective grounds”, meaning therefore that Belief is “intersubjectively communicable” (Chignell, 2007b, pp. 337, 355).

⁹⁵ A 828 / B 856.

is so interwoven with my moral disposition that I am in as little danger of ever surrendering the former as I am worried that the latter can ever be torn away from me”: because this Belief “depends on subjective grounds”, the proper expression of it will not be: “it is morally certain that there is a God”, etc., but rather ‘I am morally certain’ etc.”⁹⁶.

As Chignell’s analysis underlines, moral Belief “arises directly out of our moral vocation as rational agents in the world”, because it is not connected to particular ends or specific activities a subject is pursuing in certain circumstances, but rather “to the general and ‘absolutely necessary’ end of willing the highest good”. Therefore, moral Belief in God’s existence and in a future life holds subjective sufficiency, even though lacking sufficient objective grounds: put differently, this assent has “sufficient nonepistemic merits for subjects like us”, i.e., rational moral agents⁹⁷. This moral *Fürwahrhalten* does not and cannot establish anything with respect to God’s existence from a theoretical point of view, since its relevant grounds are non-epistemic, thus not entailing that its conclusions are true nor providing a description of reality. Nonetheless, “for a subject committed to morality”, as every rational being must necessarily be, to a greater or lesser extent, the moral Belief in God’s existence and in an afterlife “plays a role in her efforts at making sense (or a certain sense) of her engagement with the demands of practical reason”⁹⁸. In this sense, moral Belief is supported by a strong and firm non-epistemic ground. Moreover, even though it does not lead to prove or conclude to the existence of God in a theoretical sense, this does not imply that *any* form of theoretical assent on this subject is precluded: alongside the moral ones, there might be also theoretical

⁹⁶ For this and previous quotations: A 828-829 / B 856-857. To better understand the subjective grounds at stake in support of moral Belief, it is crucial to refer to the preceding section of the *Canon*, whose title is “*On the ideal of the highest good, as a determining ground of the ultimate end of pure reason*”: there Kant states with even more clarity that “God and a future life are two presuppositions that are not to be separated from the obligation that pure reason imposes on us in accordance with principles of that very same reason” (A 811 / B 839). Moreover: “reason sees itself as compelled either to assume such a thing, together with life in such a world, which we must regard as a future one, or else to regard the moral laws as empty figments of the brain, since without that presupposition their necessary success, which the same reason connects with them, would have to disappear” (ibid.). Once again: “without a God and a world that is now not visible to us but is hoped for, the majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure, objects of approbation and admiration but not incentives for resolve and realization, because they would not fulfill the whole end that is natural for every rational being and determined *a priori* and necessarily through the very same pure reason” (A 813 / B 841).

⁹⁷ Chignell, 2007b, pp. 354-356.

⁹⁸ Tomasi, 2016, p. 128.

considerations in support of the proposition that God exists⁹⁹; a (theoretical) proposition that will not amount to knowledge, but will have a peculiar epistemic status.

Shortly before introducing moral Belief, in fact, Kant had discussed another case of Belief, presenting it as follows:

Since, however, even though we might not be able to undertake [*unternehmen*] anything in relation to an object, and taking something to be true [*das Fürwahrhalten*] is therefore merely theoretical [*bloß theoretisch*], in many cases we can still conceive [*in Gedanken fassen*] and imagine [*uns einbilden*] an undertaking [*eine Unternehmung*] for which we would suppose ourselves to have sufficient grounds if there were a means for arriving at certainty about the matter; thus there is in merely theoretical judgments an analogue [*Analogon*] of practical judgments, where taking them to be true is aptly described by the word belief, and which we call doctrinal beliefs [*doktrinalen Glauben*].¹⁰⁰

Doctrinal Belief is therefore introduced as “an analogue” of the practical *Fürwahrhalten* which comes into play when the *Fürwahrhalten* itself is merely theoretical, i.e., in circumstances in which we are not “able to undertake anything in relation to an object”; notwithstanding this impossibility, we are nevertheless able to “conceive and imagine” such an undertaking, so that we can picture ourselves “to have sufficient grounds”, if only there were a way to verify it with certainty. Although the actual relation to an end (whether arbitrary or necessary) seems to be missing in this case, since nothing practical can be undertaken with regard to the object of the assent, it is nevertheless possible to envisage a scenario (*par excellence*, the betting scenario) in which such a relation arises. The potential scope of *doktrinaler Glaube* seems therefore to have a peculiar status: by the one hand, it is characterized by “merely theoretical” issues, namely problems with respect to which also theoretical reason shares with practical reason a keen interest, but which, *per se*, do not involve nor permit any practical undertaking (whether moral or pragmatic). By the other hand, those implied in doctrinal Belief are questions with regard to which it is by principle impossible to obtain any knowledge, due to the limitation of our epistemic faculties which has been traced thanks to the critique.

As a preliminary remark, it should be emphasized that the adjective “*doktrinaler*” should not be understood, in this context, as referring exclusively to articles of religion;

⁹⁹ Cf. *ivi*, p. 113.

¹⁰⁰ A 825 / B 853.

rather, Chignell suggests that it should be interpreted in a broad sense as alluding to a “teaching” or “statement” and proposes to refer to it as Theoretical Belief¹⁰¹.

3.3.1 Non-epistemic justification

As argued above, the distinguishing mark of the epistemic mode of Belief, compared to opinion and knowledge, is the presence of a peculiar conception of subjective sufficiency: the latter, in fact, does not result from the subjective assumption of objective grounds in support of the assent, but rather from the connection of the assent with a particular end or interest of reason, whether this be contingent (as seen in the case of pragmatic Belief) or necessary, since mandatorily dictated by reason itself (as for moral Belief). In Thomas Höwing’s words, “a Belief is justified not by virtue of evidence but by virtue of its relation to action”¹⁰². It might now be asked: how can this be compatible with the fact that doctrinal Belief concerns “merely theoretical judgments”¹⁰³? The answer to this question will help shed light on the peculiarities and the potential of *doktrinaler Glaube*. In order to highlight its distinctive features, it is worth considering the few instances of it mentioned by Kant by way of explanation.

He first introduces the following example:

If it were possible to settle by any sort of experience whether there are inhabitants of at least some of the planets that we see, I might well bet everything that I have on it. Hence I say that it is not merely an opinion but a strong belief (on the correctness of which I would wager many advantages in life) that there are also inhabitants of other worlds.¹⁰⁴

Kant deems this proposition (namely, that there are inhabitants of other planets) as an instance of something that, in principle, cannot be known by us in any possible way, neither through empirical observation nor by theorizing. It is therefore absolutely impossible to obtain any objective ground in support of the assent to that proposition.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Chignell, 2007b, p. 345.

¹⁰² Höwing, 2016, p. 201.

¹⁰³ A 825 / B 853.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Kant's emphasis on the "merely *theoretical*" character of the issues at stake in the case of *doktrinaler Glaube* can be understood in two coexisting senses. Firstly, for the abovementioned reason, an important specificity of doctrinal Belief is the impossibility, *as a matter of principle*, of providing sufficient objective reasons to support it; put differently, in support of its content, we not only *do not*, but also *could not* obtain any objective ground. The provided example of pragmatic Belief, instead, showed that, even though the lack of knowledge by the subject on the matter at stake was assumed, there could be, at least *in principle*, the possibility of knowing something about it¹⁰⁵. In the second place, Kant refers to the topics at stake in this kind of Belief as "*merely theoretical*" also because no one would be "able to undertake anything"¹⁰⁶ in relation to the objects of these propositions, meaning that those objects cannot in any possible way be engaged in the subject's acting, be it practical or pragmatic.

Notwithstanding this significant difference compared to moral and pragmatic Belief, also doctrinal Belief is, as with the other two, sustained by non-epistemic grounds: although it does not have as its object something with respect to which it is possible to act, it retains reference to certain ends relative to the context within which the subject is acting. As Chignell explains, in fact, Kant asks to suppose that "making a bet one way or the other [...] is the end that the subject has set for himself" in this case: in such circumstances, the subject must (or rather, is hypothetically necessitated to) assent *firmly* to a proposition or to its opposite, since "in such a high-stakes situation merely to suspend judgment or have a weak Opinion" would not be sufficient¹⁰⁷. The assent acquires subjective sufficient grounds insofar as committing to it in the form of a firm assent, i.e., Belief, has the non-epistemic merit of allowing the subject to pursue the end which is at stake in this scenario. Moreover, the issue at hand is merely theoretical, meaning that nothing practical could be undertaken with respect to it. For these reasons, doctrinal Belief is the appropriate epistemic attitude to describe the kind of holding-for-true that takes place in the subject's understanding in this peculiar circumstances.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Chignell, 2007b, pp. 345-346. In Kant's considered examples of pragmatic Belief, if the doctor had had, for instance, "better medical training, he could have had Knowledge of the sick person's malady"; and if the businessman "had just done more research, he might have been able to know whether the deal would be profitable for him". In the reference circumstances assumed by way of example, however, this is not the case: for this reason, the assent takes place in the form of a Belief (*ibid.*).

¹⁰⁶ A 825 / B 853.

¹⁰⁷ Chignell, 2007b, pp. 345-346.

The context of a forced betting, however, is not the only one through which merely theoretical questions can acquire a relation to practical ends: other examples Kant provides, in fact, appeal to more actual exigencies. Significantly, he admits with absolute clarity that “the thesis of the existence of God belongs to doctrinal belief”, insofar as it is the necessary result of the “theology of nature (physico-theology)”¹⁰⁸.

[...] although with regard to theoretical knowledge of the world I have nothing at my command that necessarily presupposes this thought as the condition of my explanations of the appearances of the world, but am rather obliged to make use of my reason as if everything were mere nature, purposive unity [*zweckmäßige Einheit*] is still so important a condition of the application of reason to nature that I cannot pass it by, especially since experience liberally supplies examples of it. But I know no other condition for this unity that could serve me as a clue for the investigation of the nature except insofar as I presuppose that a highest intelligence [*eine höchste Intelligenz*] has arranged everything in accordance with the wisest ends. Consequently, the presupposition of a wise author [*einen weisen Welturheber*] is a condition of an aim [*Absicht*] which is, to be sure, contingent but yet not inconsiderable, namely that of having a guide [*Leitung*] for the investigation of nature [*Nachforschung der Natur*].¹⁰⁹

In this case, too, an end (*Absicht*) is mentioned, i.e., precisely that of being provided with a “guide” for the scientific investigation of nature: the end at stake here can be said with more evidence to be *both* theoretical, insofar as it concerns the maximum possible increase in knowledge, *and* practical, since it requires the scientist to act in a certain way in order to attain it. Her scientific practices need to be guided and sustained by a firm and stable assent to the theoretical proposition according to which “a highest intelligence has arranged everything in accordance with the wisest ends”; an assent that will take the shape of doctrinal Belief. This assent can thus be said to be supported by strong subjectively sufficient reasons whose character is non-epistemic, insofar as they stem from the fact that the proposition to which the scientist is assenting has the subjective merit of allowing her to achieve her end. In other words, the proposition counts as a hypothetically necessary condition which makes the achievement of her goal possible. Remarkably, the proposition to which the scientist is assenting (namely, the “presupposition of a wise author”) is something about which no one could ever have any knowledge, since it entirely transcends the limits of an experience possible for us and

¹⁰⁸ A 826-827 / B 854-855.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

therefore no object corresponding to it could ever be given in intuition, thereby providing an objective ground for the assent. With respect to the epistemic status of this holding-for-true, Kant claims, “I would say too little if I called” that occurrence “merely having an opinion”: rather, “even in this theoretical relation it can be said that I firmly believe in God”. Furthermore, the “future life of the human soul” is said to be an object of doctrinal Belief too, because “the magnificent equipment of human nature and the shortness of life which is so ill suited to it” provide sufficient subjective grounds in support of this assent. Although the outcome achieved appears to be the same as in moral Belief, “in this case this belief must not strictly be called practical”¹¹⁰: on closer inspection, indeed, while moral Belief leads to the existence of God on the basis of a subjective sufficiency which is valid for every moral agent in every circumstance (since the end at stake is necessarily commanded by reason itself), the subjective sufficiency in support of doctrinal Belief is “relative to agents and contexts”, meaning that the end at stake is dependent on the relevant circumstances in which the subject is acting¹¹¹. Moreover, in the case of *doktrinaler Glaube* the issue at stake is considered from a merely theoretical point of view, without moral considerations coming into play. These are also the reasons why Kant warns about the possible instability of “merely doctrinal belief”: due to the “difficulties that come up in speculation”, “one is often put off from it”, even if only to then “inexorably” return to it again¹¹².

3.3.2 Doctrinal Belief and the regulative use of ideas

As mentioned above, Kant emphasizes the *theoretical* character of the issues related to the (subjectively) sufficient grounds in favor of the holding-for-true that takes place in doctrinal Belief. Therefore, sufficient causes on behalf of *doktrinaler Glaube* present some merits which, albeit non-epistemic, are nonetheless in some important sense theoretical¹¹³, because of their *contribution* to knowledge. In other words: doctrinal Belief does not, of course, achieve knowledge of the existence of God (being an entirely distinct

¹¹⁰ For this and previous quotations: A 826-827 / B 854-855.

¹¹¹ Chignell, 2007b, p. 353.

¹¹² A 827-828 / B 855-856. Arguably, to be fully stable and rational from a comprehensive perspective, doctrinal Belief should be “supplemented” with the support of moral Belief.

¹¹³ Cf. Chignell, 2007b, p. 349.

epistemic attitude by definition), yet it serves as a “clue” for the cognitive investigation of nature by enabling us to conceive of it as a “purposive unity”¹¹⁴. Doctrinal Belief itself, therefore, due to its epistemic status that remains markedly distinct from knowledge, obviously cannot represent any advancement in knowledge; however, judging from the examples offered by Kant, it seems possible to argue nonetheless for its positive contribution to knowledge. For if a partial, but legitimate (as long as well aware of its epistemic positioning) extension of reason into the realm of its transcendental use were completely absent, an important and irreplaceable orientation for knowledge itself would be missing. In a word: doctrinal Belief does not itself enhance knowledge but opens up the possibility of enhancing it.

In this sense, a similarity between this role of *doktrinaler Glaube*, as described in the *Canon*, and the characterization of the function of the ideas of reason in their regulative use as in the *Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic*, stands out. As outlined in the previous Chapter, Kant described the regulative use of ideas as consisting in “directing the understanding to a certain goal [*Ziele*]”, which, “although it is only an idea (*focus imaginarius*)”, since “it lies entirely outside the bounds of possible experience”, “nonetheless still serves to obtain for these concepts the greatest unity alongside the greatest extension”. As seen, these ideas ultimately point towards the “systematic unity of the understanding’s cognition”¹¹⁵, which is in itself entirely out of reach: by doing so, metaphysical thinking fulfils an indispensable function for empirical knowledge itself, insofar as it supplies the activity of the understanding with an orientation: in other words, it provides the theoretical activity itself with a proper direction to head towards. In this use, the ideal of the maximum unity of the knowledge of reason, an ideal which is “inseparably bound up with the essence of our reason”¹¹⁶, is *projected* by reason on nature itself, with the benefit of enhancing its knowledge (on condition of the awareness of the impossibility of drawing a conclusion to the systematicity of nature itself). The presupposition of the systematicity of nature assumes the form of an “as if” thinking: in our cognitive activity, reason cannot but consider nature *as if* it were systematic. This

¹¹⁴ A 826 / B 854. Cf. Fonnesu, 2015, p. 378.

¹¹⁵ For this and previous quotations: A 646-647 / B 674-675.

¹¹⁶ A 694-695 / B 722-723.

occurs both in the more specific case of the ideas of reason¹¹⁷ and in the more general case of the principles of reason¹¹⁸. It is noteworthy that this presupposition is from a merely theoretical perspective entirely unjustified, since it entails the unwarranted attribution of a *subjective* principle of reason (a *logical* principle) to the *objective* order of nature (thus turning into a *transcendental* principle): without it, however, empirical cognition would never be able even to approximate the ideal of its systematicity, and would remain stationary, incapable of any real progress. The presuppositions, inherent in regulative ideas and principles, therefore, seem to acquire their own peculiar justification insofar as they enable the pursuit of the speculative interest of reason, i.e., the perfection of its knowledge in the highest systematicity possible. In a certain sense, it could be said that, although it would be unjustified to claim to *know* that nature itself is systematic, nonetheless we are required to *believe* it if we are to increase our knowledge of it¹¹⁹. More specifically, the most appropriate form of assent to describe the kind of holding-for-true that would be required in this respect could be precisely that of doctrinal Belief, due to its connection to *merely theoretical* questions and to objects with respect to which no one would “be able to undertake anything”¹²⁰.

It is therefore possible to envisage, in order to submit it to scrutiny, a possible proximity or even overlapping of the roles and fields of investigation of these two different resources of reason. In more detail, the following question might be addressed: can the ideas of reason in their regulative use fit the profile of *doktrinaler Glaube*? Put differently: can the epistemic modality through which reason *regulatively* employs its ideas and principles be described as an instance of doctrinal Belief? If this were the case,

¹¹⁷ E.g., “we will first (in psychology) connect all appearances, actions, and receptivity of our mind to the guiding thread of inner experience *as if* the mind were a simple substance that (at least in this life) persists in existence with personal identity, while its states – to which the states of the body belong only as external conditions – are continuously changing” (A 672 / B 700). See also A 673 / B 701, A 682-686 / B 710-714.

¹¹⁸ Those of “homogeneity [*Homogenität*], specification [*Spezifikation*] and “continuity [*Kontinuität*] of forms” are principles with which reason “prepares the field for the understanding” (A 658 / B 686) and that require the latter to: first, presuppose “sameness of kind” in the manifold of a possible experience for us, because “without it no empirical concepts and hence no experience would be possible” (A 654 / B 682); second, “impose on the understanding the demand to seek under every species that comes before us for subspecies, and for every variety smaller varieties” (A 656 / B 684); third, to think that for “all manifolds are akin one to another, because they are all collectively descended, through every degree of extended determination, from a single highest genus” (A 658 / B 686).

¹¹⁹ Cf. Gava, 2023, pp. 156-160.

¹²⁰ A 825 / B 853. Transcendental ideas, in fact, are mere concepts of reason to which “no congruent object can be given in the senses” (A 327 / B 383), thereby entirely surpassing the limit of an experience possible for us.

this would strongly support the idea, here advocated, according to which doctrinal Belief represents, in its own peculiar way, a positive contribution to the advancement of knowledge.

Andrew Chignell himself suggested the idea of considering the regulative use of reason as a possible candidate for doctrinal Belief, since the type of assent at stake in such activity seems to fit very well with the profile of it. By way of example, he considered the case of simplicity: the desire of our reason to construct theories as simple as possible requires, for the possibility of its implementation, a presupposition, consisting in a *firm* assent to the principle according to which the world itself is organized in a parsimonious fashion¹²¹. Even though, for sure, this assumption cannot be supported by any objectively sufficient grounds (because there is no direct evidence of it, nor it can be reached with certainty by means of argument), nonetheless it has the powerful non-epistemic merit of enabling reason to approach its theoretical end; hence it can be said to be sustained by subjectively sufficient reasons. In the context of theoretical research, or, more specifically, theory building, this assumption is thus justified. For these reasons, from an epistemic perspective, this assumption seems to be describable as a case of doctrinal Belief. Some statements by Kant in the context of the *Appendix*, within the discussion of the “final aim of the natural dialectic of human reason”, recall extremely closely the profile of *doktrinaler Glaube*:

This highest formal unity that alone rests on concepts of reason is the *purposive* unity [*zweckmäßige Einheit*] of things; and the speculative interest [*spekulative Interesse*] of reason makes it necessary to regard every ordinance in the world as if [*als ob*] it had sprouted from the intention of a highest reason [*einer allerhöchsten Vernunft*].¹²²

Briefly recalling the passage from the *Canon* about the doctrinal Belief in God’s existence, the similarity and the thematic proximity springs to mind:

[...] purposive unity [*zweckmäßige Einheit*] is still so important a condition of the application of reason to nature that I cannot pass it by [...]. But I know no other condition for this unity that could serve me as a clue for the investigation of nature except insofar as I presuppose that a highest intelligence [*eine höchste Intelligenz*] has arranged everything in accordance with the wisest ends [*nach den weisesten*

¹²¹ Cf. Chignell, 2007b, p. 351.

¹²² A 686 / B 714.

Zwecken]. Consequently, the presupposition of a wise author of the world is a condition of an aim which is, to be sure, contingent but yet not inconsiderable, namely that of having a guide for the investigation of nature.¹²³

Both accounts, namely that of the regulative use of reason and the shorter one of doctrinal Belief, share the attention to a strong *theoretical* interest that *subjectively* justifies the assent to an assumption which is *objectively* unjustifiable, since it is unknowable in itself. The legitimacy of this assent is therefore a context-related one, since it depends on the presence of an end to be achieved as the basis for its subjective sufficiency. As Kant himself goes on to argue in the *Appendix*,

Such a principle, namely, *opens up* for reason, as applied to the field of experience, *entirely new prospects* for connecting up things in the world in accordance with teleological laws, and thereby attaining to the greatest systematic unity among them. The presupposition of a supreme intelligence, as the sole cause of the world-whole, but of course merely the idea, can therefore always be useful to reason and never harmful to it.¹²⁴

Therefore: although reason cannot directly expand its knowledge to the realm of the supersensible, it can nevertheless, through the contribution of its transcendental ideas, make the expansion of our empirical knowledge possible; if the interpretation here provided is correct, this occurs, as far as the epistemic status is concerned, in the form of a doctrinal Belief.

The idea of a close link between regulative ideas and doctrinal Belief was later taken up by Gabriele Gava, who dedicated a study precisely to the discussion of this relationship. In more detail, his analysis is geared towards the question as to whether Kant's account of *doktrinaler Glaube* can contribute to a better understanding of the "indeterminate [*unbestimmte*]", but "objective validity [*objektive Gültigkeit*]"¹²⁵ attributed to regulative ideas of reason. Gava also notices a sharp similarity between the strategy of justification of the regulative use of ideas in the *Appendix* and that of doctrinal Belief in the *Canon*¹²⁶. In fact, it seems that "if we do not believe, among other things, in the systematicity of nature and in the existence of God", then "we can rationally pursue

¹²³ A 826 / B 854.

¹²⁴ A 686-687 / B 714-715, my emphasis.

¹²⁵ A 669 / B 697.

¹²⁶ Cf. Gava, 2018, p. 1212.

neither the speculative interest of reason nor the maxims that depend on it”¹²⁷. Moreover, Gava believes that by understanding the regulative use of the ideas of reason as an instance of *doktrinaler Glaube*, it is possible to shed light on the nature of their objective but indeterminate validity¹²⁸: regulative ideas obtain their objective validity through the fact that they are *conditions of possibility* of a determinate practice, i.e., research practice; without them, in fact, the latter would not achieve any progress. In more detail, regulative ideas make possible the establishment of maxims (i.e., practical rules that must be followed in order to attain a certain end) for the theoretical exploration of nature. Kant himself, while discussing the regulative use of ideas, associates “maxims [*Maximen*] of speculative reason” with “subjective principles that are taken not from the constitution of the object but from the *interest of reason* in regard to a certain possible perfection of the cognition of this object”¹²⁹. In other words: the indeterminate objective validity of regulative ideas might consist in the fact that, within the context of research practices, “we must have a firm conviction of the validity of these ideas, even if we can by no means regard them as a case of knowledge [*Wissen*]”¹³⁰.

3.4 Conclusions and further considerations

The investigation of the forms of assent as presented in the *Canon of Pure Reason* has offered a means of framing the ways in which it is possible for reason, *with legitimacy*, to “get beyond the boundaries of possible experience”¹³¹. The fundamental question underlying and guiding this exploration was the following: to what extent can reason, in its *theoretical* use, provide a *justified* assent with respect to the scope of things in themselves, which albeit remain absolutely unknowable for it? In regard to this problem, it seems that the standard and most frequent interpretation of the extent to which theoretical reason can reach in the field of things in themselves might be too restrictive and limiting. According to standard readings, in fact, the results of the first *Critique* can be summarized in the failure of any attempt by theoretical reason to access in any way

¹²⁷ Ivi, p. 1213, my translation.

¹²⁸ Cf. Ivi, p. 1210.

¹²⁹ A 666 / B 694, my emphasis.

¹³⁰ Ivi, p. 1213, my translation.

¹³¹ B xix.

the field of the supersensible, and in the consequent unleashing of a space for integration by the results that will be accessible to practical reason. This investigation has, however, highlighted the need to embrace a more “liberal” account of theoretical possibilities. First of all, attention was brought to the possibility for reason to engage with *thought* in a domain in which, however, it cannot gain any *knowledge* at all. Therefore: in which *form*, and to which *extent* can reason think in the field of things in themselves? Where can it find an orientation for its thinking, to avoid “groping among mere concepts”¹³²?

The analysis here conducted has highlighted a space for a form of *theoretical* assent which is not itself based on moral arguments: this is the space of doctrinal Belief, a *rational* and *justified* form of assent with respect to the field of things in themselves which is founded in theoretical, but non-epistemic grounds; a form of *Fürwahrhalten* which can be valid in the context of issues with respect to which it is absolutely impossible to obtain any knowledge due to the inevitable limitation of our faculties. According to Kant, therefore, we need not renounce any form of assent towards what lies beyond the boundaries of an experience possible for us: the possibility of Belief is a resource that reason, in its metaphysical thinking, provides to rational activity in general.

Hence the ineliminable tendency of reason to quench its metaphysical urge, forcing us to elevate ourselves “entirely above all instruction from experience”¹³³, once submitted to critique, might no longer result in delusion and betrayal¹³⁴, but rather in a righteous aspiration towards ends prescribed by our own nature. Once reason has firmly established its boundaries and autonomously submitted itself to their respect, its metaphysical disposition no longer leads to a “battlefield” of “endless controversies”¹³⁵, but might rather be itself a precious resource to guide us in a field where we are necessarily driven by our own nature, but where the touchstone of experience is missing; a resource of reason, in short, “for *orienting* itself in thinking”¹³⁶ in the field that suits it best, being akin to its higher destination.

In his 1786 essay *Was heißt sich im Denken orientieren?*, Kant writes that “to *orient* oneself in thinking in general means: when objective principles of reason are

¹³² B xv.

¹³³ B xiv.

¹³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

¹³⁵ A viii.

¹³⁶ AA 08:137.

insufficient for holding something true, to determine the matter according to a subjective principle". The domain of the insufficiency of objective principles, i.e., "that immensurable space of the supersensible", must not necessarily be "filled with dark night"¹³⁷. Just as in space we orient ourselves geographically on the basis of the "feeling of a difference" between our right and left, thinking can orient itself on the basis of the "reason's feeling of its own need [*das Gefühl des der Vernunft eigenen Bedürfnisses*]", and thus "venture to go beyond all possible experience"¹³⁸. This subjective feeling of need gives reason the right to presuppose and assume something which it "may not presume to know through objective grounds"¹³⁹. Kant expresses it clearly:

[...] the final touchstone [*den letzten Probirstein*] of the reliability of judgment is to be sought in *reason alone*, whether in the choice of its propositions it is guided by insight or mere need and the maxim of what is advantageous to reason itself.¹⁴⁰

Accordingly, "seeking the supreme touchstone [*der obersten Probirstein*] of truth in oneself" means precisely "*thinking for oneself* [*Selbstdenken*]"¹⁴¹. Eventually, Kant reveals an ultimate trust in the possibility of reason to find guidance in metaphysical thought *within itself*: it is precisely by appealing to its *inner* resources that reason, led by the feeling of its rightful subjective need, approaches the supersensible in the most proper way possible. This subjective need, in fact, eventually results in a "pure rational faith", combining within itself the fulfilment of both a theoretical and (most of all) of a practical need: it is a strong and firm Belief, "not inferior in degree to knowing, even though it is completely different from it in kind"¹⁴². "All believing", indeed, "is a holding-for-true [*Fürwahrhalten*] which is subjectively sufficient, but *consciously* [*mit Bewußtsein*] regarded as objectively insufficient"¹⁴³. Even though this Belief can never develop into knowledge, because its field does not admit the possibility of objective grounds in support for it, nonetheless thanks to it a human being "can make out his path, in both a theoretical

¹³⁷ For this and the previous quotation: *ibid.*

¹³⁸ AA 08:136.

¹³⁹ AA 08:137.

¹⁴⁰ AA 08:140.

¹⁴¹ AA 08:146.

¹⁴² AA 08:141-142.

¹⁴³ AA 08:141, translation modified.

and a practical respect, in a way which is fully in accord with the whole end of his vocation”¹⁴⁴.

Here then, Kant’s renowned statement in the second *Preface* of the *KrV*, according to which he “had to deny *knowledge* [*Wissen*] in order to make room for *faith* [*Glauben*]”, acquires a new meaning and light: the *Glaube* for which Kant made room through the critique might *not only* be *moral* Belief (as most commentators seem to assume¹⁴⁵), *but also* its *theoretical* counterpart, which, at the level of the *KrV*, is understood as doctrinal Belief. Hence reason, reaching the furthest edges of its possibilities, finds itself endowed with an unprecedented resource, which can act as a “signpost” or a “compass” for its thinking: metaphysics, the “culmination of all *culture* of human reason”¹⁴⁶, can be guided by a firm rational Belief, thanks to which “the speculative thinker orients himself in his rational excursions into the field of supersensible objects”¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴⁴ AA 08:142.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Chignell, 2007b, p. 359.

¹⁴⁶ A 850-851 / B 878-879.

¹⁴⁷ AA 08:142.

Conclusion

The present work was intended to be an exploration of the boundaries of theoretical reason with respect to its metaphysical thinking, within the context of Kant's philosophy in the framework of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. This survey was conducted, first and foremost, out of an investigation of the underlying motivations that led Kant to the elaboration of this work. Keeping the fundamental problem of metaphysics as a focal point, the first Chapter dealt with retracing Kant's "critical path", culminating in the establishment of his mature doctrine of transcendental idealism. The latter, indeed, proved to be the novel ground upon which Kant sets his new solution to the question as to the possibility of metaphysics as well as his theory of possible experience. The result of its analysis made it possible to shed light on the close link connecting the transcendental distinction between *Erscheinung* and *Ding an sich* and the recognition of a limit to human knowledge, which, together with the ever-lasting tendency to overcome it, has been the real guiding thread running through the present work: this twofold movement of reason, moreover, has repeatedly recurred at every level on which the present study has been carried out. The interpretation of transcendental idealism made it possible to determine with precision the exact boundaries of our cognitive possibilities, resulting in the core thesis of "Kantian humility". Furthermore, through the examination of the debate about the correct reading of Kant's idealism, the possibility of a "positive" counterbalance to our unavoidable ignorance with respect to the domain of things in themselves has emerged, insofar as this discussion has revealed a legitimate space within which reason can perform its theoretical activity in a purely intellectual form, i.e., in the form of mere thought. The continuation of the work was then motivated by the attempt to determine the guise in which this space of possibility, as yet completely "empty", could legitimately be "filled". The achievements in this respect were essentially two.

The first accomplishment was brought to light by the second Chapter, dealing with an investigation of the actual possibilities and boundaries of a "reformed" metaphysics in both its traditional branches. With respect to *metaphysica generalis*, i.e., ontology, the research led to the positive outcome of reconceiving the latter as transcendental philosophy, namely a science, partially carried out in the *KrV*, consisting in the doctrine

of the possibility of all a priori knowledge, exposing its concepts and principles. This discipline, however, by Kant's own admission, is not an end in itself but rather has as its aim the foundation of a metaphysics in its *specialis* section, concerned with the realm of the supersensible. Despite the difficulties expressed by the *Transcendental Dialectic*, a promising result has also been shown with respect to this branch: the survey of its possibilities culminated in the acknowledgment of a positive role for the regulative use of ideas. Reason's theoretical activity in the field of the supersensible gives rise by necessity to transcendental ideas, which, although not amounting to any knowledge, nonetheless present a further potential, resulting in the possibility of enhancing knowledge itself. Their irreplaceable role consists in directing the cognitive activity of the understanding towards a *focus imaginarius*, lying beyond the bounds of possible experience, allowing knowledge to approximate to its systematic unity.

Secondly, the in-depth examination of the notion of *Fürwahrhalten* as presented by Kant in the *Canon of Pure Reason*, carried out in the third Chapter of the present work, made it possible to highlight the possibility of alternative forms of "holding-for-true" with respect to knowledge: a topic of major interest has been represented by the discussion of *doktrinaler Glaube*, as a theoretical form of assent with respect to issues about which knowledge is by principle precluded to us finite cognizers. Regarding these topics, although the possibility of speaking the language of knowledge must cease, nonetheless the possibility to speak that of Belief arises: even in the face of objective insufficiency, its subjective sufficiency enables Belief to satisfy, at least partially, the metaphysical need of human reason by allowing it, to some extent, to overcome the limits of possible experience without ever surrendering its own rationality. Once again, then, the same movement of reason reoccurs: on the one hand, the radical recognition of its limitation; on the other, the never-ending attempt to glance beyond it.

The case of the regulative use of ideas and that of doctrinal Belief, therefore, both represented forms of non-cognitive approximation to the unknowable domain of things in themselves, or, more specifically, to the realm of the supersensible. The exploration of these two resources seems to have sketched out a common ground or space for an investigation whose result is qualitatively *other* than knowledge, but nonetheless is rightful to the extent that it contributes positively to the advancement of the latter. It seems thus that the space for an extension of reason into the realm of the supersensible does not

end altogether with the transition to the practical domain, but rather provides resources intrinsic to the theoretical domain itself. Interestingly, this additional level to that of knowledge proper, for which a legitimacy of investigation has been acknowledged, appears to be later developed and systematized in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in the form of the reflective judgment. The major advancement, in this respect, between the *KrV* and the subsequent *KU* was Kant's discovery, as testified in a letter of December 1787, of "a new sort of a priori principles" for the "faculty of feeling pleasure and displeasure"¹, corresponding to the faculty of cognition of the power of judgment². This uncovering resulted in the elaboration of the principle of the "purposiveness [*Zweckmäßigkeit*] of nature" as the transcendental principle of the power of reflective judgment: according to it, "the particular empirical laws [...] must be considered in terms of the sort of unity they would have if an understanding (even if not ours) had likewise given them for the sake of our faculty of cognition"³. This concept of a purposiveness of nature is also named "a regulative principle of the faculty of cognition": in this sense, it "still belongs among the concepts of nature"⁴, but at the same time it is precisely that "which makes possible the transition from the purely theoretical to the purely practical", providing the "mediating concept between the concepts of nature and the concept of freedom"⁵. A potential further development of this research might therefore deal with a possible relationship between the scope of the regulative ideas of reason and doctrinal Belief in the *KrV* and that of the reflective power of judgment in the subsequent *KU*. The field prepared, but still left "undetermined" by the understanding, will later be recognized as the rightful domain within which the reflective judgment can provide its peculiar theoretical resources:

Through the possibility of its *a priori* laws for nature the understanding gives a proof that nature is cognized by us only as appearance, and hence at the same time an indication of its supersensible substratum; but it leaves this entirely *undetermined*. The power of judgment, through its *a priori* principle for judging nature in accordance with possible particular laws for it, provides for its supersensible substratum (in us as well as outside us) *determinability through the intellectual faculty*.⁶

¹ AA 10:514.

² Cf. AA 05:198.

³ AA 05:180.

⁴ For this and the previous quotation: AA 05:197.

⁵ AA 05:196.

⁶ AA 05:196.

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