

Kant, the Copernican Devolution, and Real Metaphysics

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Human reason has this 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.

Reason falls into this perplexity through no fault of its own. It begins from principles whose use is unavoidable in the course of experience and at the same time sufficiently warranted by it. With these principles it rises (as its nature also requires) ever higher, to more remote conditions. But since it becomes aware in this way that its business must always remain incomplete because the questions never cease, reason sees itself necessitated to take refuge in principles that overstep all possible use in experience, and yet seem so unsuspecting that even ordinary common sense agrees with them. But it thereby falls into obscurity and contradictions, from which it can indeed surmise that it must somewhere be proceeding on the ground of hidden errors; but it cannot discover them, for the principles on which it is proceeding, since they surpass the bounds of all experience, no longer recognize any touchstone of experience. The battlefield of these endless controversies is called **metaphysics**.

– Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Avii-viii)

The central theme of this book is: realism about structure. The world has a distinguished structure, a privileged description. For a representation to be fully

successful, truth is not enough; the representation must also use the right concepts, so that its conceptual structure matches reality's structure. There is an objectively correct way to "write the book of the world." ...

I connect structure to fundamentality. The joint-carving notions are the fundamental notions; a fact is fundamental when it is stated in joint-carving terms. A central task of metaphysics has always been to discern the ultimate or fundamental reality underlying the appearances. I think of this task as the investigation of reality's structure.

– Theodore Sider, *Writing the Book of the World*¹

Introduction

It is an ironic fact that philosophers who fail to take the history of philosophy sufficiently seriously are doomed to repeat its errors.

As a striking case-in-point, *contemporary Analytic metaphysics*, for all its logico-technical brilliance and its philosophical rigor,² essentially amounts to what I will call the *Copernican Devolution*, a retrograde evolution in philosophy that brings us back, full-circle, to naive, pre-Kantian, pre-critical conceptions of mind, knowledge, and world that are essentially Baconian, Cartesian, Spinozist, and especially Leibnizian-Wolffian in nature.³ Characteristic of this contemporary philosophical backsliding are commitments to noumenal realism in ontology, to Conceptualism about the nature of mental representation, to a heavy reliance on modal logic as providing direct insight into the ultimate structure of noumenal reality, and to a dogmatic scientific naturalism usually combined with scientific essentialism.

The Copernican Devolution is, in fact, a disastrously regressive turn in philosophy. More specifically, contemporary Analytic metaphysicians really and truly need to learn Kant's

eighteenth-century lessons (1) about the inherent limits of human cognition and knowledge, (2) about the unsoundness of all possible ontological arguments from logical or analytic necessity to actual or real existence, (3) about the essential cognitive-semantic difference between (3i) mere logical, analytic (a.k.a. “weak metaphysical”) possibility and (3ii) real, synthetic (a.k.a. “strong metaphysical”) possibility, and (4) about the essential ontological difference between noumena and phenomena. For without these insights, they have been, are, and forever will be inevitably led into the very same “obscurity and contradictions” that beset classical metaphysics prior to Kant (Avii).

But as they say, *it’s an ill wind that blows nobody any good*; that is, few misfortunes are so bad that they do not have some unintended good side effects for somebody. Hence, seeing the Copernican Devolution for what it really is, a philosophically disastrous regression, makes it possible for us to provide a well-focused re-characterization of Kant’s metaphysics in a contemporary context.

In this light, Kant’s critical metaphysics is decisively what I will call a “real” (or, alternatively, “human-faced”) metaphysics, and correspondingly it can be illuminatingly presented in terms that specially emphasize what I call Kant’s “proto-critical” period in the late 1760s and early 1770s and also his “post-critical” period in the late 1780s and 1790s, both of which are somewhat neglected or undervalued, even by contemporary Kantians. Looked at this way, Kant’s real or human-faced metaphysics consists, fundamentally, of the following six commitments:

- (i) a strict evidential appeal to human experience, which I call *the criterion of phenomenological adequacy for metaphysical theories*,

- (ii) a radical epistemic agnosticism about both the nature and existence of noumenal reality,
- (iii) a thoroughgoing diagnostic critique of deep confusions in “ontological argument”-style (and more generally, noumenal-metaphysical) reasoning that is driven by modal logic,
- (iv) a maximally strong version of non-Conceptualism in the theory of mental representation, and correspondingly, a direct argument for transcendental idealism from the nature of human sensibility together with non-Conceptualism, that is essentially in place by the time of Kant’s famous letter to Marcus Herz in 1772 (C 10:129-35),
- (v) modal dualism and apriorism (according to which there are two essentially distinct types of necessity, both of which are irreducibly *a priori*, combined with a strong commitment to the “necessity if and only if apriority” thesis), and finally,
- (vi) a theory of synthetic *a priori* truth and knowledge, grounded directly on non-Conceptualism.

I will briefly sketch, unpack, and defend each of these six Kantian commitments.

In freely going back and forth between Kant’s philosophy and contemporary philosophy, I am applying the following strong metaphilosophical principle, for which I have argued elsewhere,⁴ that I call *The No-Deep-Difference Thesis*:

There is no fundamental difference in philosophical content between the history of philosophy and contemporary philosophy.

In other words, in doing contemporary philosophy one is thereby directly engaging with the history of philosophy, and in doing the history of philosophy one is thereby directly engaging with contemporary philosophy. There is no serious distinction to be drawn between the two.

The criterion of phenomenological adequacy for metaphysical theories

In the B preface of the first *Critique*, Kant says that “there is no doubt that up to now the procedure of metaphysics has been a mere groping, and what is the worst, a groping among mere concepts [*bloßen Begriffen*]” (Bxv). A “mere concept” is the same as an *empty* (*leer*) concept or *noumenal* concept, which in turn is a concept that is minimally well-formed in both a formal-syntactical and sortal sense, and also logically self-consistent, but essentially disconnected from human sensibility and actual or possible sensory intuition and all its apparent or manifestly real natural objects, hence a concept that does not have *objective validity* (*objective Gültigkeit*). Smoothly compatibly with this Kantian critical line of thinking, Peter Unger titled his recent critique of Analytic philosophy *Empty Ideas*.⁵

But according to Kant, real metaphysics must be evidentially grounded on human experience. Or otherwise put, real metaphysics reverse-engineers its basic metaphysical (including ontological) theses and explanations in order to conform strictly to all and only what is *phenomenologically self-evident* in human experience. By “phenomenologically self-evident” I mean this:

A claim C is phenomenologically self-evident for a rational human subject S if and only if (i) S’s belief in C relies on directly-given conscious or self-conscious manifest evidence about human experience, and (ii) C’s denial is either logically or conceptually self-contradictory (i.e., a Kantian analytic self-contradiction), really metaphysically impossible (i.e., it is a Kantian synthetic *a priori* impossibility), or pragmatically self-

stultifying for S (i.e., it is what Kant calls “a contradiction in willing” in the *Groundwork*).

This leads directly to what I call *the criterion of phenomenological adequacy for metaphysical theories*:

A metaphysical theory MT is phenomenologically adequate if and only if MT is evidentially grounded on all and only phenomenologically self-evident theses.

By this criterion, contemporary Analytic metaphysics is clearly phenomenologically *inadequate*, and so is classical metaphysics more generally, whereas by sharp contrast, Kant’s real metaphysics of transcendental idealism is, arguably, fully phenomenologically adequate.

Kant’s radical agnosticism

According to Kant, both the origins and limits of human cognition or *Erkenntnis* are determined by the nature of our specifically human sensibility or *Sinnlichkeit* (B1, A19-49/B33-73). In particular, there is an inherent cognitive-semantic constraint on all fully or “thickly” meaningful cognition: a cognition is “objectively valid,” i.e., fully or “thickly” meaningful, if and only if it presupposes actual or possible externally-triggered sensory intuitions or *Anschauungen* of empirical objects (A238-42/B298-300, A289/B345), presented within the global, framing structures of egocentrically-centered, orientable (i.e., it contains intrinsic enantiomorphic directions determined by a subject embedded in the space or time) phenomenal space and time.

Empirical objects in this specific, anthropocentric sense are *appearances* (*Erscheinungen*) or *phenomena*; by sharp contrast, objects of cognition which, if they existed, would fall outside the scope of human sensibility, are mere “entities of the understanding [*Verstandeswesen*]” or *noumena* (A235-60/B294-315, esp. B306). In short, a noumenon, if it

were to exist, would be a non-sensory, non-empirical, non-spatiotemporal, trans-human object, a *supersensible object* (A254-55/B355). If, in addition to being a noumenon in this supersensible-object sense (a.k.a. “a noumenon in the negative sense”), any noumenal object which, if it were to exist, would *also* be an individual Cartesian/Leibnizian substance, whose nature is completely determined by intrinsic non-relational properties, would be a “thing in itself [*Ding an sich*]” (a.k.a. “a noumenon in the positive sense”) (B306-7).

Now I am being *very* careful about my formulations here, in two ways.

First, I am distinguishing between *negative* noumena (“supersensible” objects in the minimal sense of *non-sensory* objects) and *positive* noumena (things in themselves). Why? Because I think it is arguable that Kant held that there are perfectly legitimate negative noumena, or supersensible/non-sensory objects (e.g., abstract objects in the formal sciences, especially mathematical objects like numbers), that are NOT positive noumena or things in themselves (e.g., God, immortal souls, etc.), and indeed are at least partially constituted by (by being in necessary conformity with) the forms of our sensible intuition, and hence they are thoroughly as-it-were *phenomenal*.

Second, I am framing the concepts of a noumenon and of a thing in itself counterfactually, hence NOT committing Kant to the claim that things in themselves really exist. Why? Because I think that we should not automatically assume that Kant believes that noumena or things in themselves really exist. This of course is one of the great controversies in Kant-interpretation. And my own view is that Kant is in fact a “methodological eliminativist” about things in themselves (A30/B45, A255/B310, A286-87/B343). But at the very least, we need to remain open-minded and not be dogmatic about Kant’s supposed commitment to the real existence of things in themselves, especially given Kant’s own deep and fully explicit insight

about the basic ontological distinction between (i) logically or analytically defined objects (merely thinkable objects), and (ii) actually or really existing objects (experienceable, knowable objects).

Now back to Kant's cognitive semantics. For Kant, a cognition is fully meaningful if and only if it is *empirically meaningful from the human standpoint*. Failing this, a cognition is "empty [*Leer*]" (A51/B75), and therefore it not only (i) lacks a directly referential, empirical-intuitional grounding in actually existing empirical objects, but also (ii) lacks a truth-value (hence it is a "truth-value gap") (A58/B83). Incidentally, element (i) is a crucial feature of Kant's famous critique of ontological arguments for God's existence: all such arguments lack a directly referential, empirical-intuitional grounding in actually existing empirical objects; hence the predicate "exists," as deployed in such arguments, is merely a "logical" predicate, and not a "real" or "determining" predicate. I will come back to Kant's worries about ontological arguments later.

Now it is important to recognize that, for Kant, "empty" cognition *need not necessarily be wholly meaningless, or nonsense*: it *can* be partially or "thinly" meaningful if (and only if) it is logically well-formed according to the logical forms of judgment/categories, and also conceptually and/or logically consistent (Bxxvi note, A239/B298). This is what Kant calls mere "thinking [*Denken*]," according to concepts (*Begriffen*). In turn recognizing our natural capacity for mere thinking is *meta-philosophically* important because mere thinking is characteristic of classical metaphysics, and consequently also of contemporary Analytic metaphysics.

Thinking about X establishes the *logical* or *analytic* possibility of X. But it does NOT establish the *real* or *synthetic* possibility of X. Hence a crucial mistake in classical metaphysics, and correspondingly a crucial mistake in contemporary Analytic metaphysics, is to confuse

logical or analytic possibility/necessity with real or synthetic possibility/necessity. As we will see in the next section, this metaphysical confusion leads directly to deep “obscurity and contradictions” (Aviii).

In other words, David Lewis, Kit Fine, David Chalmers, John Hawthorne, Theodore Sider, and Timothy Williamson, for all their logico-technical brilliance and their philosophical rigor, and even despite their high-powered contemporary professional philosophical status, are every bit as confused and wrongheaded as Christian Wolff. They make all the same old mistakes, just as if they had never been made before. For example, when Sider asserts, without any doubt, hesitation, or irony whatsoever, just as if the previous 235 years of European philosophy had never happened, that “[t]he world has a distinguished structure, a privileged description,” that “[f]or a representation to be fully successful, truth is not enough; the representation must also use the right concepts, so that its conceptual structure matches reality’s structure,” and that “there is an objectively correct way to ‘write the book of the world,’” it simply takes your Kantian breath away.⁶ Amazing. That is the Copernican Devolution. On the contrary, Kant holds that real metaphysics is based fundamentally on reasoning with real or synthetic possibilities/necessities, NOT on reasoning with logical or analytic possibilities/necessities.

In any case, the cognitive-semantic determination of full meaningfulness of a cognition by sensibility, in turn, sharply constrains the scope of knowledge in the strict sense of “scientific knowledge [*Wissen*]”: objectively convincing true belief with certainty (A820-22/B848-50). Since strict or scientific knowledge requires truth, but truth-valuedness requires objective validity or empirical meaningfulness, then if a cognition is not objectively valid/empirically meaningful, then it *cannot be either true or false*, and therefore *it cannot be strict or scientific knowledge*. In particular, it directly follows from this point that in the strict or scientific sense of

“knowledge,” *we cannot know things in themselves, either by knowing their nature, or by knowing whether they exist or do not exist.* In other words, we know *a priori*, by reflection on the cognitive semantics of human cognition, that we cannot have strict or scientific knowledge of things in themselves. This is what I call Kant’s *radical agnosticism* – “radical,” because unlike ordinary agnosticism (epistemic open-mindedness or doxic neutrality about some claim C), it is strict or scientific *a priori* knowledge about our necessary ignorance of things in themselves, and about our necessary inability to know or prove whether things in themselves (e.g., God) exist or do not exist.

Given the truth of Kantian radical agnosticism, it directly follows that neither classical Rationalist metaphysics nor contemporary Analytic metaphysics, since they are based on mere thinking alone, and reasoning from mere logical or analytic possibilities, is capable of having strict or scientific knowledge, despite all their highly technically sophisticated, rigorous-sounding, dogmatic claims about knowledge of things in themselves. Moreover, it also directly follows from Kantian radical agnosticism that any claim in *speculative natural science* that violates the cognitive-semantic constraints on strict or scientific knowledge (e.g., any natural-scientific claim about positive noumenal entities belonging to microphysical essences, e.g., molecules, atoms, quarks, neutrinos, etc., etc.), is a truth-value gap. Hence *any form of metaphysical noumenal realism in natural science* is deeply mistaken.⁷

Kant’s critique of modal metaphysics

Kant’s critique of modal metaphysics is based on his radical agnosticism and his cognitive semantics. The core of Kant’s critique is that it is a philosophically tragic mistake to make a

naive use of modal logic for ontological and metaphysical purposes. Indeed, that is the core philosophical message of the entire “Transcendental Dialectic” (A293-704/B349-732).

In particular, modal metaphysicians make the following three basic errors: (i) they confuse the purely logical or analytic sense of the predicate “exists” with the metaphysically real or synthetic sense of the predicate “exists” (A592-602/B620-30), (ii) they confuse purely logical or analytic possibility with real or synthetic possibility and therefore correspondingly also confuse purely logical or analytic necessity (a.k.a. “weak metaphysical necessity”) with real or synthetic necessity (a.k.a. “strong metaphysical necessity”) (A226-35/B279-87), and (iii) they confuse the purely logical or analytic notion of an object with the real or synthetic notion of an object.

Re (i). The purely logical notion of existence is particular quantification, construed as a second-order concept: “X exists” is a judgment or proposition containing a first-order concept X and a second-order concept, “exists,” which says that some object falls under that first-order concept X, in some domain of objects, x_1, x_2, x_3 , etc. But real existence or actual existence, *Realität* or *Wirklichkeit*, i.e., the *schematized* pure concept or category of existence, requires the *intuition* of the object, and more specifically it requires the empirical intuition of a causally relevant or efficacious object in egocentrically-centered, orientable, phenomenal space and time (A225-26/B272-74). But these are *non*-logical, *non*-analytic, and essentially *non*-conceptual cognitive-semantic facts. Hence it is a modal-metaphysical fallacy to infer from purely logical, analytic, or conceptual proofs of existence to real, synthetic, or intuitional (=essentially non-conceptual) proofs of existence (A258-59/B313-15).

And this is as true of *logically necessary existence* as it is of logically contingent existence. Truth of a proposition in all logically possible worlds does NOT establish real or

actual existence in the actual, real world of rational human experience, unless the objective validity of the constituent concepts in the proposition has already been established. Hence, for example, all ontological proofs of God's existence fail. But the more general point against modal metaphysics is that ANY kind of ontological proof in modal logic cannot discriminate between noumenal (supersensible, divine-standpoint) existence and phenomenal (experiential, human-standpoint) existence.

Now, given Kantian radical agnosticism, we know *a priori* that noumenal existence, that is, Cartesian-Leibnizian style substances with intrinsic non-relational essences, cannot be known in the strict or scientific sense. Therefore, ALL ontological proofs in modal metaphysics are unsound, and what is even worse, if they are falsely assumed to be sound, then they lead directly to hyper-contradictions or paradoxes, that is, *antinomies of pure reason* (A405-567/B432-595).

Re (ii). Logical or analytic possibility establishes only the pure logical or analytic consistency of a set of concepts or properties in what Kant calls *pure general logic*, namely second-order intensional monadic predicate logic (A52-55/B76-79).⁸ But in order for something to be really possible, or synthetically possible, it must also be shown to be empirically intuitable – but this cannot be established through pure general logic or concepts alone.

This in turn points up a subtle but absolutely fundamental point about Kant's theory of logical truth: because a proposition cannot be either true or false unless all its constituent concepts are objectively valid, even the truths of pure general logic are *not* "topic-neutral." The "generality," or "formality" of pure general logic for Kant (A54/B78) does NOT mean that logical truths are *semantically insensitive* to domains of truth-making objects, or "models." Radically on the contrary, Kantian pure logical generality means that a logical truth is such that its meaning and truth are necessarily underdetermined by whatever objects occur in a given

logically possible world. This is because every logical truth is *objectively valid*, hence every logically possible world contains some possible objects of human experience. Indeed, for Kant, a possible world is simply a maximally consistent set of different conceivable ways the actual world of human experience could have been (A571-74/B579-602) Hence even a logical truth, like all truth (A58/B52), consists in an “agreement,” conformity, or correspondence between the formal content of a pure-logical proposition and its proper “objects,” that is, a cross-world semantic configuration consisting of multiple self-contained, other-containing, or identical/perfectly overlapping sets of objects in possible worlds, across all possible worlds.

This is sharply different from the conceptions of logical generality, logical formality, and logical truth in *conventionalist* accounts of the foundations of logic, which still dominate in contemporary Analytic metaphysics, *even though* the conventionalist theory of logical truth was in fact decisively criticized and refuted by Quine in “Truth by Convention” in the mid-1930s.⁹ The problem is that post-Quinean philosophers of logic have simply not been able to find a more adequate account of the foundations of logic since Carnap. So for the last eighty years, they have simply rolled along as if the conventionalist theory were somehow minimally adequate. But if I am correct, then the only philosophically adequate account of the foundations of logic, grounds logic on *human rationality*, in a broadly Kantian way.¹⁰

In any case, from a Kantian logical point of view, it is a basic modal-metaphysical fallacy to infer from purely logical or analytic possibility to real or synthetic possibility. But since logical necessity is defined in terms of logical possibility (i.e., “necessarily P” is necessarily equivalent with “not possibly not P”) this means that it is also a modal metaphysical fallacy to infer from purely logical or analytic necessity to real or synthetic necessity. More specifically, a purely logical or analytic proof of necessity cannot discriminate between noumenal necessity

(the necessity of unknowable, unperceivable, causally irrelevant and causally inert, intrinsic non-relational essences) and phenomenal necessity (the necessity of knowable, perceivable, causally relevant and causally efficacious, intrinsic relational spacetime essences). Therefore, ALL proofs of necessity and essence in modal metaphysics – for example, Saul Kripke’s famous proof for truths of scientific essentialism, via his modal logical proof of the necessity of identity¹¹ – are unsound, and as per the Transcendental Dialectic, if they are assumed to be sound, then they lead to hyper-contradictions or logical paradoxes.

Re (iii). As we have seen already, the purely logical or analytic notion of an object, as a mere bundle of mutually logically or conceptually consistent concepts or properties (a.k.a. the *thin* notion of an object), is essentially different from the real or synthetic notion of an object, as an empirically intuitable, causally relevant, and causally efficacious object in egocentrically-centered, orientable phenomenal space and time (a.k.a. the *thick* notion of an object). Hence it is a modal metaphysical fallacy to infer directly from the purely logical or analytic properties of “thin” objects to the real or synthetic properties of “thick” objects.

This modal fallacy has fundamentally important philosophical implications for twentieth-century and contemporary Analytic philosophy, including Analytic metaphysics. For example, Frege’s notion of a set (crucial to his definition of “number”) based on the naive comprehension axiom (axiom 5 in *Basic Laws of Arithmetic*) failed to take account of this difference.¹² Hence it permitted the unrestricted formation of sets containing ANY sort of objects, including *noumenal* or supersensible objects, and especially including sets formed entirely of sets that are not members of themselves – but this led directly to Russell’s Paradox, which says that necessarily, the set of all sets that are not members of themselves, call it K, is a member of itself if and only if it is not a member of itself. Russell’s Paradox, in turn, undermines classical Frege-Russell

Logicism, when it is taken together with Gödel's incompleteness theorems: (i) necessarily, *Principia*-style logical systems + the Peano axioms for arithmetic are consistent if and only if they are incomplete (i.e., not all tautologies are theorems), and (ii) the truth-definitions of such systems must lie outside those systems themselves. And this fundamental negative result in twentieth-century philosophy – that classical Logicism is false – is of course perfectly in line with Kant's eighteenth-century anti-Leibnizian thesis that arithmetic in particular and mathematics more generally, is NOT explanatorily reducible to logic (+/- polyadic quantification, and +/- set theory). That is, mathematics is synthetic, not analytic.

Now it is important to see here that I am *not* saying that all or even most contemporary Analytic metaphysicians are committed to classical Fregean or even to neo-Fregean Logicism – on the contrary, all or most of them are not so committed, or at least not explicitly so committed, although perhaps in their philosophically romantic moments they may still quietly long for the heady, good old days of Logicism, wine, and roses. All I am saying is that Frege's failed project of Logicism, at the very outset of the Analytic tradition, is a particularly vivid example of the sort of catastrophic philosophical error to which contemporary Analytic metaphysics is inherently subject. In short, the philosophical project of modal metaphysics, whether classical Rationalism or contemporary Analytic metaphysics, is doomed to tragic failure.

And this failure is genuinely “tragic” for two reasons.

First, the collapse of modal metaphysics induces a serious meta-philosophical skepticism about the prospects for ANY sort of metaphysics, thus making philosophy itself seem empty, trivial, and “scholastic” in the worst sense, nothing but a “glass bead game [*Glasperlenspiel*]” played by super-clever professional academic philosophers, which, as Kant clearly saw, is the death of philosophy (Avii-xii).

And **second**, the cognitive origins of what we can call “the drive to modal metaphysics,” the conation of pure theoretical reason (Axi), which is the fundamental rational human need for absolute grounding – in effect, the intense desire to be like God and have godlike knowledge, “intellectual intuition” (B71-73) – is a natural effect of the capacity for human rationality (A293-98/B349-55). Indeed, this “drive to modal metaphysics,” at bottom, is nothing but sublimated ethics and sublimated religion (Bxxv; Pro 4:350-65), disguising itself as “rigorous science [*strenge Wissenschaft*].” Hence the drive to modal metaphysics is not something that can be merely brushed off or laughed away: in fact, it is a perpetual threat to the survival of philosophy as a fundamental, rational human project, stemming from the will-to-philosophy itself, and from human reason’s failure or refusal to recognize its own “human, all-too-human” limits.

These deep Kantian metaphilosophical critical insights about the nature, errors/fallacies, and cognitive sources of modal metaphysics are very similar to the later Wittgenstein’s critique of philosophy – and his critique of the philosophical theories of his own earlier self, the author of the *Tractatus* – in the *Philosophical Investigations*.¹³ Hence it is no accident that contemporary Analytic metaphysicians normally completely ignore the later Wittgenstein, and typically do not even consider him to be a philosopher.

Kant’s Non-Conceptualism, Kantian Non-Conceptualism, and Kant’s proto-critical argument for transcendental idealism for sensibility

The four-year period from 1768 to 1772 was a fundamentally important phase in Kant’s philosophical career – centered on the fully critical period from 1781 to 1787 – so important, in fact, that I will call it his *proto-critical* period, in order to distinguish it sharply from both his

dogmatic-slumber-filled Leibnizian/Wolffian *pre-critical* period and also what I call his *post-critical* period after 1787.

In this section, I want to demonstrate an essential connection that emerged during Kant's proto-critical period between his *Non-Conceptualism* and his *transcendental idealism*, by tracing this line of thinking directly back to his seminal proto-critical essay of 1768, "Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Directions in Space," a.k.a. "Directions in Space" (DS 2:377-83).

I will begin by defining some technical terms: "transcendental idealism," "Conceptualism," "Non-Conceptualism," "Kantian Conceptualism," and "Kantian Non-Conceptualism."

In a nutshell, Kant's thesis of transcendental idealism says that the basic structure of the apparent or phenomenal world necessarily conforms to the pure or non-empirical (hence *a priori*) structure of human cognition, and not the converse (Bxvi-xviii). In other words, Kant is saying that the phenomenal world fundamentally conforms to the *a priori* structure of the human mind, and it is not the case that the human mind fundamentally conforms to the phenomenal world, or indeed to any non-apparent or *noumenal* world.

And here is Kant's primary argument for transcendental idealism. If the human mind fundamentally conformed to the world, whether phenomenal or noumenal, then since human knowledge of the world would be contingent on the existence and specific character of that world, then *a priori* human knowledge of the world would be impossible (C 10:130-31). But *a priori* human knowledge of the phenomenal world (e.g., in mathematics) is already actual and therefore really possible. So the phenomenal world necessarily conforms to the *a priori* structure of the human mind. And in particular, the phenomenal world fundamentally conforms to our *a*

priori representations of *space* and *time*, because that is the only acceptable philosophical explanation of the real possibility of mathematical knowledge (ID 2:398-406; A19-49/B33-73).

So if Kant is correct, then he is saying that the world in which we live, move, and have our being (by which I mean the phenomenal natural and social world of our ordinary human existence) is fundamentally dependent on *our* minded nature, and not the converse. Correct or incorrect, transcendental idealism seems to me to be a deeply important philosophical thesis. For one thing, if transcendental idealism is true, then we cannot be inherently alienated from the world we are trying to know, as global epistemic skeptics claim, and human knowledge – not only *a priori* knowledge, but also *a posteriori* knowledge – is therefore really possible.¹⁴

In general, the thesis of Conceptualism¹⁵ says that the representational content of human cognition is essentially conceptual, and necessarily determined by our conceptual capacities. *Strong* Conceptualism says that our conceptual capacities are not only necessary but also sufficient for determining the content of human cognition, and *weak* Conceptualism says that our conceptual capacities are not alone sufficient but also require a contribution from some or another non-conceptual capacity (e.g., the capacity for sense perception) in order to determine the (ultimately conceptual) content of human cognition. Correspondingly, the thesis of (essentialist content) “Non-Conceptualism”¹⁶ says that at least some of the representational contents of human cognition are not essentially conceptual, and not necessarily determined by our conceptual capacities, and also that these contents, on the contrary, are essentially non-conceptual, and necessarily determined by our non-conceptual capacities (e.g., the capacity for sense perception).

Although these distinctions might initially seem Scholastic in the bad sense and trivial, the opposition between Conceptualism and (essentialist content) Non-Conceptualism is

philosophically important. This is because what is at issue is nothing more and nothing less than the nature of the human mind. According to Conceptualism, human minds are basically *intellectual* in character, having nothing inherently to do with the embodied, sense-perceiving, affective, desiring, animal side of human nature. By contrast, according to (essentialist content) Non-Conceptualism, human minds are basically bound up with the embodied, sense-perceiving, affective, desiring, animal side of human nature, and are *not* basically intellectual in character: on the contrary, the intellectual capacities of the human being constitutively presuppose, and are thereby grounded on and built on top of, the non-intellectual capacities. Hence the philosophical debate about Conceptualism versus Non-Conceptualism is really a debate about whether an *intellectualist* or a *non-intellectualist* conception of the human mind is the correct one. This has far-reaching implications not only for other parts of the philosophy of mind, but also for epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and philosophical anthropology,¹⁷ and even political philosophy, to the extent that it depends on ethics and philosophical anthropology.

Although both Conceptualism and (essentialist content) Non-Conceptualism are competing theses/doctrines in contemporary philosophy of mind, their philosophical origins both go back to Kant.¹⁸ Hence it is possible to defend either *Kantian* Conceptualism or *Kantian* (essentialist content) Non-Conceptualism, as competing interpretations of Kant's theory of human cognition in particular and of Kant's philosophy of mind more generally.

Now according to Kant, our conceptual capacities are located in the *understanding* (*Verstand*), whose operations yield concepts, judgments/propositions, and inferences, when those operations are also supplemented by our further intellectual capacities for apperception or self-consciousness, for judgment and belief, and for logical reason or inference. By contrast, again according to Kant, our non-conceptual capacities are located in the *sensibility* (*Sinnlichkeit*),

which contains both a non-intellectual sub-capacity for sense perception and also a non-intellectual sub-capacity for imagination, and whose operations yield material or formal intuitions, material images, and formal images or schemata. Human sensibility for Kant, it must also be noted, *further* contains non-intellectual sub-capacities for feeling, desiring, and sensible willing or “the power of choice [*Willkür*].” In other words, sensibility for Kant is as much non-cognitive or practical, as it is cognitive or theoretical.

Since Kant believes that the understanding and the sensibility, as capacities, are essentially distinct from and irreducible to one another, and also that both are required for rational human cognition (and in the case of human practical reason, a.k.a. “the faculty of desire [*Begehrungsvermögen*],” both are required for rational human action and agency), Kant is also a *cognitive capacity dualist*.

But is Kant a Conceptualist or a Non-Conceptualist? Or in other words, is Kant a cognitive *content* dualist as well as a cognitive *capacity* dualist? Or in still other words, is Kant an *intellectualist* about the nature of the human mind, or a *non-intellectualist*?

The intellectualist thesis of Kantian Conceptualism says that, for Kant, the representational content of human cognition is essentially conceptual, and necessarily determined by the understanding. And just as there are strong and weak versions of Conceptualism in general, so too there are strong and weak versions of Kantian Conceptualism.¹⁹ By contrast, the non-intellectualist thesis of Kantian (essentialist content) Non-Conceptualism says that, for Kant, at least some of the representational contents of human cognition are not essentially conceptual and not necessarily determined by the understanding, and also that these contents, on the contrary, are essentially non-conceptual and necessarily determined by our sensibility.²⁰

The classic or standard line of Kant-interpretation in twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy simply took it as obvious that Kant is a Conceptualist and also an intellectualist. So the Non-Conceptualist interpretation of Kant is importantly revolutionary and unorthodox, and even if it were not correct (although I do think it *is* correct), nevertheless it has forced Conceptualist, intellectualist Kantians to rethink, re-argue, and rework their previously unchallenged view.²¹

But most importantly for the purposes of this essay, both classical Rationalist metaphysics and also contemporary Analytic metaphysics alike *presuppose Conceptualism and intellectualism*. For example, the very idea of ontological arguments in modal metaphysics requires the truth of Conceptualism. Correspondingly, real metaphysics in the Kantian sense requires the truth of (essentialist content) Non-Conceptualism and non-intellectualism.

Now I can reformulate the main aim of this section more precisely, in four sub-claims. What I want to claim is

- (i) that Kant is an (essentialist content) Non-Conceptualist,
- (ii) that there is a specifically non-intellectualist version of Kant's transcendental idealism that depends inherently on the nature of human sensibility,
- (iii) that Kant's (essentialist content) Non-Conceptualism is foundational for any philosophically defensible version of his transcendental idealism, and
- (iv) that this line of thinking in Kant can be traced directly back to his proto-critical "Directions in Space" essay.

In other words, what I want to claim is that Kant's non-intellectualism about the human mind goes all the way down into *real metaphysics*; that it is defensibly arguable that the apparent world fundamentally conforms to human *sensibility* even if it does not fundamentally conform to

the human *understanding*; and that the basic source of all this is Kant's (initially proto-critical but later also critical) theory of *space* and how we represent it.

Kant's "Directions in Space" essay contains an argument against the *relational* or Leibnizian view of space and in favor of the *absolute* or Newtonian view of space (DS 2:377-83), but this merely scratches the surface of Kant's argument. The relational theory of space says that the nature of space is necessarily determined by extrinsic relations between objects in space. By contrast, the absolute theory of space, as Kant understands it, says that the nature of space is necessarily determined by a single universal framework – a *global space-frame* – in which physical objects are inherently embedded or located as filling up and realizing proper parts of the global space-frame, whose structure necessarily includes certain special intrinsic relational topological properties that allow for fundamental *asymmetries*, in addition to the familiar Euclidean relational topological properties and relations, which are symmetrical.

According to Leibniz, who was a relationist about space, the objects standing in extrinsic relations are monads. So space is actually a "well-founded phenomenon" for Leibniz, and strongly supervenient on the intrinsic non-relational properties of noumenal monads. Nevertheless, other relationists about space, including Kant himself in the *Physical Monadology* (Ak 1:475-87), hold that these objects are actually material point-sources of causal forces in real physical space. So the version of relationism that Kant was working with in "Directions in Space" is not an orthodox Leibnizian theory.

According to Newton, who was an absolutist about space, the single universal framework in which physical objects are embedded is itself a noumenal entity. But as far as I know, Newton was unaware of the idea that the structure of absolute space contains special asymmetry-allowing

intrinsic relational topological properties. Hence the version of absolutism that Kant was working with in “Directions in Space” is also not an orthodox Newtonian theory.

According to Kant in “Directions in Space,” space does indeed constitute a global frame for embedding or locating physical objects, like Newtonian space, but also (and much more importantly) it is an *egocentrically-centered, orientable space* with inherent structural asymmetries such as mirror-reflected incongruence or “handedness” in qualitatively identical objects (enantiomorphy), which Kant also calls “incongruent counterparts” (DS 2:377-83). “Orientable spaces” are spaces with intrinsic directions, and “egocentric centering” means that the specific characteristics of an orientable space are fixed indexically and locally by conscious embodied perceivers who are themselves actually embedded or located within the total global space-frame.

In “Directions in Space,” Kant discovered that structural asymmetries such as handedness can be detected and differentiated only by the essentially non-intellectual, non-conceptual outer sensibility of living, embodied, conscious, cognizing subjects like us, who are actually embedded or located in such a global space, and therefore that there is a necessary isomorphism between the representational form of the outer sensibility of such subjects, the abstract structure of that global space, and the material structure of perceivable objects also embedded or located in that global space:

Because of its three dimensions, physical space can be thought of as having three planes, which all intersect each other at right angles. *Concerning the things which exist outside ourselves: it is only in so far as they stand in relation to ourselves that we have any cognition of them by means of the senses at all. It is, therefore, not surprising that the ultimate ground, on the basis of which we form our [representation] of directions in*

space, derives from the relation of these intersecting planes to our bodies. The plane upon which the length of our body stands vertically is called, with respect to ourselves, horizontal. This horizontal plane gives rise to the difference between the directions which we designate by the terms *above* and *below*. On this plane it is possible for two other planes to stand vertically and also to intersect each other at right angles, so that the length of the human body is thought of as lying along the axis of the intersection. One of these two vertical planes divides the body into two externally similar halves, and furnishes the ground of the difference between the *right* and the *left* side. The other vertical plane, which also stands perpendicularly on the horizontal plane, makes possible the [representation] of the side *in front* and the side *behind*. ... Since the distinct feeling of the right and the left side is of such great necessity for judging directions, *nature has established an immediate connection between this feeling and the mechanical organisation of the human body.* (DS 2:378-80, emphasis added)

In short, the apparent or phenomenal world must conform to the form of our embodied outer sensibility; that is, the apparent or phenomenal world must conform to the form of human outer intuition.

Now for Kant the form of human outer sensibility or intuition is *essentially non-conceptual* for three reasons.

First, Kant says explicitly in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that intuitions of outer sense or inner sense, which pick out appearances – the undetermined objects of empirical intuitions (A20/B34) – are possible for us independently of the functions of our understanding, that is, independently of our concepts:

[S]ince an object can appear to *us only by means of ... pure forms of sensibility, i.e., be an object of empirical intuition*, space and time are thus pure intuitions that contain *a priori* the conditions of the possibility of objects as appearances, and the synthesis in them has objective validity. ... [O]bjects can indeed appear to us *without necessarily having to be related to functions of the understanding*. ... [A]ppearances can certainly be given in intuition *without functions of the understanding*. ... For appearances could after all be so constituted that the understanding would not find them in accord with the conditions of its unity, and ... in the succession of appearances nothing would offer itself that would furnish a rule of synthesis and thus correspond to the concept of cause and effect, so that this concept would therefore be entirely empty, nugatory, and without significance. *Appearances would nonetheless offer objects to our intuition, for intuition by no means requires the functions of thinking.* (A89-91/B121-23, emphasis added)

That representation that can be given prior to all thinking is called **intuition**. (B132)

[T]he manifold for intuition must already be **given prior to the synthesis of understanding and independently from it**. ... (B145, emphasis added)

Second, Kant explicitly claims in some pre-critical writings and critical writings alike that at least nonhuman animals (e.g., oxen and dogs) (FS 2: 59-60; JL 9: 64-65) and some nonrational human animals (e.g., ordinary human infants) (A 7: 127-128) are capable of sense perception and thus capable of inner and outer sensory intuition, but do not possess conceptual capacities.²²

Third, and most importantly for our purposes, our pure or non-empirical representation of space picks out egocentrically-centered, orientable, asymmetric structural topological

properties of space that *cannot* be represented by the understanding and concepts. This is shown by the “incongruent counterparts” argument, which, in a nutshell, says:

- (1) Incongruent counterparts, like our right and left hands, by hypothesis, are such that they possess all their *conceptually*-representable qualities in common, yet they still are essentially different because they are incongruent.
- (2) This incongruence and the essential difference between our right and left hands is immediately and veridically represented by human cognizers, but only by means of our empirical *intuition* of real objects in physical space and also our pure sensory *intuition* of the structure of space, as necessarily conforming to the form of our outer sensibility or intuition.
- (3) Therefore, our pure or non-empirical (hence *a priori*) representation of space is necessarily underdetermined by concepts.²³

When the conclusion of the incongruent counterparts argument is conjoined with the first two reasons, then it follows that the form of our outer sensibility or intuition is essentially non-conceptual and also *a priori*.

Therefore, in “Directions in Space,” at least implicitly, Kant is saying that the basic structure of the apparent or phenomenal world necessarily conforms to the essentially non-conceptual *a priori* form of human embodied outer sensibility or intuition. This line of argument is made even more explicit in, and furthermore is strongly supported by, Kant’s doctrine of the nature of space in the Inaugural Dissertation, *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World* (1770) (ID 2:403); by his argument for the transcendental ideality of space in the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783) (Pro 4:286); and by his later discussion of

geographical spatial orientation in “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” (1786) (OT 8:135).

This way of reading “Directions in Space,” however, is confusingly concealed by the way that Kant formulates his main thesis in the essay:

My purpose in this treatise is to see whether there is not to be found in the intuitive judgements about extension, such as are to be found in geometry, clear proof that:
Absolute space, independently of the existence of all matter and as itself the ultimate foundation of the possibility of the compound character of matter, has a reality of its own. (DS 2:378)

In other words, the notion of *absolute* space, as Kant is using it in “Directions in Space,” is ambiguous as between

- (i) a *global space-frame* with orientability, egocentric centering, and structural asymmetries, that fundamentally conforms to the essentially non-conceptual representational structure of human outer sensibility or intuition, and
- (ii) *noumenal* space, as in Newton.

However, by the time of the Inaugural Dissertation, and then later in the Transcendental Aesthetic and throughout the critical period, it is perfectly clear that for Kant the global space-frame must be transcendently ideal, and cannot be noumenal.

So for all these reasons, I want to claim that the central argument in “Directions in Space” is almost certainly the major proto-critical philosophical breakthrough that Kant famously reports when he says in one of the *Reflexionen* that “the year ’69 gave me great light” (Ak 18:69 [R5037]). More precisely, what Kant had discovered between 1768 and 1772 is what I call *transcendental idealism for sensibility*. In 1772, Kant told Marcus Herz that if the human

mind conformed to the world, whether phenomenal or noumenal, then *a priori* knowledge would be impossible (C 10:130-31); but by 1770 Kant already also held that *a priori* knowledge of the phenomenal world is already actual and therefore really possible in mathematics, hence the phenomenal world must conform to the non-empirical sensible structure of the human mind, and more specifically must conform to our *a priori* representations of space and time, since that is what makes mathematics really possible (ID 2:398-406). So transcendental idealism for sensibility says that the apparent or phenomenal world fundamentally conforms to the essentially non-conceptual *a priori* forms of human sensibility, our representations of space and time.

Kant worked out explicit proofs for transcendental idealism for sensibility in the Inaugural Dissertation and again in the Transcendental Aesthetic in the first *Critique*. The simplest version of the proof, provided in the Transcendental Aesthetic, goes like this:

- (1) Space and time are either (i) things in themselves, (ii) properties of/relations between things in themselves, or (iii) transcendently ideal.
- (2) If space and time were either things in themselves or properties of/relations between things in themselves, then *a priori* mathematical knowledge would be impossible.
- (3) But mathematical knowledge is actual, via our pure intuitions of space and time, and therefore really possible.
- (4) Therefore, space and time are transcendently ideal. (A23/B37-38, A38-41/B55-58)

There is, of course, much more that can and should be said about this highly controversial argument. What is most crucial for our purposes here, however, is that this version of transcendental idealism relies *only* on essentially non-conceptual content and the nature of human sensibility, and *neither* relies on concepts and the nature of human understanding, *nor*

does it entail that the phenomenal world necessarily conforms to our concepts and the nature of human understanding.

Kant's modal dualism, apriorism, and theory of the synthetic *a priori*²⁴

Kant's modal dualism, apriorism, and theory of the synthetic *a priori* can be boiled down to three basic parts, each of which contains three sub-theses.

First, (i) a belief, judgment, proposition, or statement is analytic if and only if its meaningfulness and truth or falsity are necessarily determined by intrinsic conceptual connections, including the intensional "containment" of a predicate-concept in a subject-concept (e.g., "Bachelors are unmarried"), conceptual identity (e.g., "Bachelors are bachelors"), and the intrinsic conceptual connections characteristic of pure general logic (e.g., The Principle of Minimal Non-Contradiction, namely, "Not every proposition and its negation are both true," i.e., " $\sim (P) (P \& \sim P)$ "), alone, no matter what the other semantic constituents of those beliefs, judgments, and so on, might be.

(Note: I have given the weakest possible version of the universal Principle of Non-Contradiction here, in order to accommodate Kant's explicit thesis in the Antinomies of Pure Reason that *if* certain deeply confused or outright false metaphysical assumptions are made, *then* antinomies, paradoxes, or "true contradictions" logically follow. In this sense, Kant is the first serious *dialetheic logician* in the history of modern philosophy, and thus the first serious exponent of *non-classical logic* in post-seventeenth-century philosophy. And obviously Hegel was also deeply influenced by this thesis.)

(ii) The universal criterion of analyticity is that the negation of any analytic proposition entails a conceptual or logical contradiction (A150-53/B189-93).

And finally (iii) an analytic truth is a necessary truth that is true in every conceptually and/or logically possible world. Simply put, analytic truth and knowledge are conceptual truth and knowledge.

Second, (i) a belief, judgment, proposition, or statement is synthetic if and only if its meaningfulness and truth or falsity are necessarily determined by the empirical or non-empirical sensible intuitions that are semantic constituents of the relevant belief, judgment, proposition, or statement, not by pure general logic alone, and not by the concepts that must also belong to it.

(ii) The universal criterion of syntheticity is its negation is conceptually and logically consistent, that is, its negation does not entail a conceptual or logical contradiction.

And finally (iii) a synthetic truth is true in all and only the possible worlds that meet the special spatiotemporal and mathematical conditions of human sensible experience, a.k.a. the “experienceable worlds,” and a truth-value gap otherwise. Simply put, synthetic truth and knowledge are essentially non-conceptual truth and knowledge.

Third, (i) apriority entails both non-empiricity and necessity (and conversely), and aposteriority entails both empiricity and contingency (and conversely).

Kant’s “necessity if and only if apriority” thesis is controversial and has been generally rejected by Analytic metaphysicians, who, following Kripke, claim that there are necessary *a posteriori* truths and also contingent *a priori* truths. Give the quasi-canonical status of this Kripkean dogma, refuting it takes some serious cognitive-semantic work, which I have undertaken elsewhere.²⁵ But the basic idea of the anti-Kripkean critique is that the necessary *a posteriori* and the contingent *a priori* are both *myths* (a) because they presuppose a highly questionable conception of the *a priori-a posteriori* distinction, (b) because the inference from

empiricality to aposteriority is fallacious (e.g., does anyone seriously think that “3 beer bottles made by Budweiser + 4 beer bottles made by Budweiser = 7 beer bottles made by Budweiser” is *a posteriori* just because it has significant empirical content?), and (c) because Kripke’s argument is systematically ambiguous as between the epistemic and semantic properties of *sentences* and the epistemic and semantic properties of *propositions* (e.g., even if it is true that *the same sentence-type* ‘Water is H₂O’ has tokens such that one sentence-token under one semantic interpretation is necessary and *a priori*, and another token under another interpretation is contingent and *a posteriori*, it does not follow that there is a single *proposition* “Water is H₂O” that is both necessary and *a posteriori*).

(ii) Whereas all analytic beliefs, judgments, etc., must be *a priori*, there are nevertheless not only synthetic *a posteriori* beliefs, judgments, etc., like “The cat is on the mat,” but also, and most importantly – since this uniquely semantically characterizes the necessary truths of mathematics (e.g., “3+4=7”), metaphysics (e.g., “Every event has a cause”), and philosophy (e.g., “Persons are conscious, intentional, free agents”) more generally – there also really can be, and really are, synthetic *a priori* truths.

And finally (iii) whereas a synthetic *a posteriori* truth is a contingent truth – hence its negation is conceptually and logically consistent – that is true in some experienceable worlds and false in some experienceable worlds, and a truth-value gap otherwise, by sharp contrast, a synthetic *a priori* truth is a necessary truth that is true in all and only the experienceable worlds, and a truth-value-gap otherwise.

For example, “3+4=7” is a synthetic *a priori* truth. This is because its meaningfulness and truth are necessarily determined by our non-empirical sensory intuition of the successive, serial, recursive (i.e., generated by repeated self-applications of the same operation) structure of

the moments of phenomenal time, which provides a unique model of the natural numbers, not by pure general logic alone, and not by the concepts that must also belong to “ $3+4=7$.”

Correspondingly, “It is not the case that $3+4=7$ ” is *not* a conceptual or logical contradiction, because there are conceptually and logically possible worlds in “ $3+4=7$ ” is not true, namely, either worlds without phenomenal time per se or worlds without anything isomorphic to the structure of phenomenal time in them, hence worlds without any natural numbers in them.

Nevertheless “ $3+4=7$ ” is never false in any logically possible world, since it is true in all the experienceable worlds and also a truth-value gap in all the rest of the conceptually and logically possible worlds.

In other words, a synthetic *a priori* truth is a “necessary truth with a human face,” that is, an *anthropocentrically necessary truth*, hence it is a necessary truth *even though its negation is logically and conceptually consistent*. It does not tell us what an omniscient God or a disembodied thinking spirit could know by reason alone; instead it tells what only a rational, but also finite, embodied, sensible creature like us, could ever know.

Indeed, it is precisely this irreducibly anthropocentric semantic and epistemic character of synthetic apriority that has seemed, and still seems, most puzzling and even downright paradoxical to those who cut their philosophical teeth on Humean Empiricism or Logical Empiricism, including most contemporary early twenty-first-century professional academic philosophers. This is because Empiricism presupposes, without argument, that there is one and only one kind of necessary truth, namely, analytically necessary truths, that is, conceptual truths or logical truths. Therefore, Empiricism is always explicitly or implicitly committed, without argument, to *modal monism*. Not only that but also both classical Rationalism and contemporary

Analytic metaphysics alike, as well as Conceptual analysis,²⁶ are all committed to modal monism.

On the contrary, and as against Empiricism, Conceptual analysis, classical Rationalism, and contemporary Analytic metaphysics, Kant is committed to *modal dualism*, and therefore the Kantian doctrine of necessity is that there are irreducibly two essentially different kinds of necessary truths, analytic (conceptually necessary) and synthetic *a priori* (non-conceptually necessary). Correspondingly, the general idea of a necessary truth in a Kantian, modal dualist framework is this:

a belief, judgment, proposition, or statement is necessarily true if and only if it is true in every member of a well-defined, complete class of logically possible worlds, and never false in any logically possible world.

This formulation encompasses both logically or analytically necessary truths (true in all logically possible worlds) and synthetically necessary truths (true in all experienceable worlds and a truth-value gap otherwise) alike.

It is a sad but true sociological fact of contemporary professional academic philosophical life that nothing bores distracted introductory students, stressed-out graduate students, and jaded professional philosophers too, more quickly and utterly, than discussing the analytic-synthetic and *a priori-a posteriori* distinctions. So I also need to answer this question explicitly: Do the analytic-synthetic and *a priori-a posteriori* distinctions *actually matter*, and if so, why?

Yes, they actually matter! In fact, they *massively matter*.

And they actually and massively matter, precisely because (i) this pair of distinctions tells us what kinds of truth and knowledge are really possible for creatures like us, so that having a good theory of them tells us how human cognitive rationality is really possible, and

(ii) this pair of distinctions tells us what kinds of truth and knowledge are really possible in philosophy, so that having a good theory of them tells us how philosophy is really possible. In short, these distinctions actually and massively matter because without them, it would be *the end of the rational and philosophical world as we know it* – both human rationality and philosophy would be really impossible.

Conclusion

Very simply put, the Copernican Devolution in contemporary Analytic metaphysics, just like classical seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Rationalist metaphysics prior to Kant – especially Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Christian Wolff, together with seventeenth-century scientific naturalism, especially Bacon – says that metaphysics “writes the book of the world,” and therefore it knows the world and ourselves from the absolute standpoint. The absolute standpoint is the same as Thomas Nagel’s “view from nowhere,”²⁷ whether this is, on the one hand, *God’s standpoint*, or, on the other hand, the modern equivalent of God’s standpoint, *the standpoint of all-knowing mechanistic natural science*, according to which “science is the measure of all things.”²⁸ Hence the Copernican Devolution is at once a *metaphysics from nowhere* and a *metaphysics for “moist robots.”*²⁹

By sharp contrast, Kant’s real metaphysics, on its negative side, says (i) that noumenal modal metaphysics leads inevitably and directly to “obscurity and contradictions” (the critique of pure reason) (Aviii), and (ii) that noumenal modal metaphysics is phenomenologically inadequate and explanatorily empty. But on its positive side, transcendental idealism, it says that real metaphysics knows the world and ourselves necessarily and *a priori* from the rational human experiential standpoint, and therefore with phenomenological adequacy, but also without

noumenal dogmatism, fallacy, or paradox. Hence it is *a rationally and phenomenologically adequate metaphysics with a human face*.

The philosophical battle cry of the nineteenth-century neo-Kantians, against a profoundly wrong-headed Hegelianism, was “Back to Kant!” But as I have argued, contemporary Analytic metaphysicians really and truly need to learn the older Kantian lessons in order to make a metaphysics of the future really possible. Hence for the rest of the twenty-first century and beyond, the real and true philosophical battle cry, against a tragically wrongheaded Analytic metaphysics, and toward the real metaphysics of the future, is *Forward to Kant!*³⁰

Notes

1. Theodore Sider, *Writing the Book of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), vii.

2. The leading figures of Analytic metaphysics include David Lewis, David Chalmers, Kit Fine, John Hawthorne, Theodore Sider, and Timothy Williamson; and some of its canonical texts are David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Sider, *Writing the Book of the World*; David J. Chalmers, *Constructing the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Timothy Williamson *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

3. The Copernican Devolution also has a mirror reflection in contemporary Kant-scholarship.

See, e.g., Anja Jauernig, *The World According to Kant: Things in Themselves and Appearances in Kant's Critical Idealism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); Anja Jauernig,

Thought and Cognition According to Kant: Our Cognitive Access to Things in Themselves and Appearances in Kant's Critical Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); and

Nicholas F. Stang, *Kant's Modal Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

It is tempting to give a philosophical-sociological explanation of this trend as the natural result of

Ph.D. training in departments dominated by Analytic metaphysicians, especially Princeton.

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4. See Robert Hanna, "Back to Kant: Teaching the First *Critique* as Contemporary Philosophy," *APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (spring 2009): 2-6, <http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.apaonline.org/resource/collection/808CBF9D-D8E6-44A7-AE13-41A70645A525/v08n2Teaching.pdf>.
 5. Peter Unger, *Empty Ideas: A Critique of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
 6. Sider, *Writing the Book of the World*, vii.
 7. See Robert Hanna, *Kant, Science, and Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chs. 3-4.
 8. See Robert Hanna, "Kant's Theory of Judgment," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (fall 2013), sect. 2.1 and supplement 3, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/kant-judgment/>; and Robert Hanna, "The Jäsche Logic," in *The Cambridge Kant Lexicon*, ed. Julian Wuerth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), <http://cambridgekantlexicon.com/>.
 9. W. V. O. Quine, "Truth by Convention" (1936), in *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 77-106.
 10. See Robert Hanna, *Rationality and Logic* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).
 11. See Saul Kripke, "Identity and Necessity," in *Meaning and Reference*, ed. A. W. Moore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 162-91; and Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).
 12. See Gottlob Frege, *Basic Laws of Arithmetic*, trans. and ed. Montgomery Furth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964).

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13. See Robert Hanna, “Wittgenstein and Kantianism,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Wittgenstein*, ed. Hans-Johann Glock and John Hyman (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming), sect. 3.
14. Robert Hanna, *Cognition, Content, and the A Priori: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind and Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), esp. chs. 3, 6-8.
15. See, e.g., Wilfrid Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” in *Science, Perception, and Reality* (New York: Humanities, 1963), 127-196; Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968); and John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).
16. See, e.g., Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, ed. John McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982). In the contemporary debate about Conceptualism versus Non-Conceptualism, it is now standard to draw a distinction between *state* (or possession-theoretic) Non-Conceptualism and *content* Non-Conceptualism. State Non-Conceptualism says that there are mental states for which the subject of those states fails to possess concepts for the specification of those states. Content Non-Conceptualism, by contrast, says that some mental states have content that is of a different *kind* from that of conceptual content. In turn, *essentialist* content Non-Conceptualism says that the content of such states is of a categorically or essentially different kind from that of conceptual content. For a general survey of Non-Conceptualism, see José Bermúdez and Arnon Cahen, “Nonconceptual Mental Content,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (spring 2012), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/content-nonconceptual/>. For the distinction between state and content Non-Conceptualism, see Richard G. Heck, Jr., “Nonconceptual Content and the ‘Space of Reasons,’” *Philosophical Review* 109, no. 4 (Oct. 2000): 483-523. And for the distinction between non-essentialist and essentialist

content Non-Conceptualism, see Robert Hanna, “Kantian Non-Conceptualism,” *Philosophical Studies* 137, no. 1 (Jan. 2008): 41-64; Robert Hanna, “Beyond the Myth of the Myth: A Kantian Theory of Non-Conceptual Content,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 19, no. 3 (2011): 323-98; and Hanna, *Cognition, Content, and the A Priori*, ch. 2.

17. See, e.g., Robert Hanna, “Sensibility First: From Kantian Non-Conceptualism to Kantian Non-Intellectualism,” unpublished ms. (spring 2015),

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[Conceptualism_to_Kantian_Non-Intellectualism_Spring_2015_version_comments_welcomed_](https://www.academia.edu/11942928/Sensibility_First_From_Kantian_Non-Conceptualism_to_Kantian_Non-Intellectualism_Spring_2015_version_comments_welcomed_).

18. See, e.g., McDowell, *Mind and World*; and Robert Hanna, “Kant and Nonconceptual Content,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (Aug. 2005): 247-90.

19. See, e.g., Christian Helmut Wenzel, “Spielen nach Kant die Kategorien schon bei der Wahrnehmung eine Rolle? Peter Rohs und John McDowell,” *Kant Studien* 96, no. 4 (Dec. 2005):

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and James Conant (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 197-239; Nathan Bauer, “A Peculiar Intuition:

Kant’s Conceptualist Account of Perception,” *Inquiry* 55, no. 3 (2012): 215-37; Aaron M.

Griffith, "Perception and the Categories: A Conceptualist Reading of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*," *European Journal of Philosophy* 20, no. 2 (June 2012): 193-222; Jessica Williams, "How Conceptually-Guided Are Kantian Intuitions?" *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (Jan. 2012): 57-78; John McDowell, "The Myth of the Mind as Detached," in *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the-World: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate*, ed. Joseph K. Schear (London: Routledge, 2013), 41-58; Robert B. Pippin, "What is 'Conceptual Activity'?" in *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the-World*, 91-109; and Sacha Golob, "Kant on Intentionality, Magnitude, and the Unity of Perception," *European Journal of Philosophy* 22, no. 4 (Dec. 2014): 505-28.

20. See, e.g. Hanna, "Kantian Non-Conceptualism"; Robert Hanna and Monima Chadha, "Non-Conceptualism and the Problem of Perceptual Self-Knowledge," *European Journal of Philosophy* 19, no. 2 (June 2011): 184-223; Hanna, "Beyond the Myth of the Myth"; Hemmo Laiho, *Perception in Kant's Model of Experience* (Ph.D. diss., University of Turku, 2012); and Clinton Tolley, "The Non-Conceptuality of the Content of Intuitions: A New Approach," *Kantian Review* 18, no. 1 (March 2013): 107-36. Weaker versions of Kantian Non-Conceptualism are defended by, for example, Lucy Allais, "Kant, Non-Conceptual Content and the Representation of Space," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47, no. 3 (July 2009): 383-413; Colin McLear, "Two Kinds of Unity in the *Critique of Pure Reason*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53, no. 1 (Jan. 2015): 79-110; Christian Onof and Dennis Schulting, "Space as Form of Intuition and as Formal Intuition: On the Note to B160 in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*," *Philosophical Review* 124, no. 1 (Jan. 2015): 1-58; and Peter Rohs, "Bezieht sich nach Kant die Anschauung unmittelbar auf Gegenstände?" in *Kant und die Berliner Aufklärung. Akten des IX. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, ed. Volker Gerhardt, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, and Ralph Schumacher, vol. 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), 214-28.

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21. See, e.g., Colin McLear, “The Kantian (Non-)conceptualism Debate,” *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 11 (Nov. 2014): 769-90.
22. See, e.g., Colin McLear, “Kant on Animal Consciousness,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 11, no. 15 (Nov. 2011): 1-16.
23. For more fully spelled out versions of this argument, see Hanna, “Kantian Non-Conceptualism”; Hanna, “Beyond the Myth of the Myth”; and Hanna, *Cognition, Content, and the A Priori*, ch. 3.
24. For more detailed discussions of these topics, see Robert Hanna, *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chs. 3-5; Hanna, “Kant’s Theory of Judgment,” sections 2.2.2-2.2.3; and Robert Hanna, “Axioms,” “Synthesis,” and “Synthetic A Priori,” in *The Cambridge Kant Lexicon*, ed. Julian Wuerth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), <http://cambridgekantlexicon.com/>.
25. See Hanna, *Kant, Science, and Human Nature*, ch. 3; and Hanna, *Cognition, Content and the A Priori*, ch. 4.
26. See, e.g., Frank Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
27. See Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
28. See Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, <https://archive.org/stream/baconsnovumorgan00bacouoft#page/n3/mode/2up>; Hanna, *Kant, Science, and Human Nature*; Robert Hanna, “Kant, Natural Piety, and the Limits of Science,” unpublished ms. (fall 2015), https://www.academia.edu/17038961/Kant_Natural_Piety_and_the_Limits_of_Science_Fall_2015_version_comments_welcomed_; and Robert Hanna, “Kant, Scientific Pietism, and Scientific

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29. See, e.g., Jennifer Schuesser, “Philosophy That Stirs the Waters,” *New York Times* (29 April 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/30/books/daniel-dennett-author-of-intuition-pumps-and-other-tools-for-thinking.html?emc=eta1&_r=0.

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