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THE SOCRATISM OF IMMANUAL KANT

In this paper, I shall investigate the character and purpose of the work of the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, in light of ancient philosophy. I shall argue that Kant is the most important and influential philosopher of the modern age, not by breaking with antiquity but by redeeming the philosophic promise of the ancient Greek world. Not only does Kant redeem the highest philosophical ideals of antiquity, he does so not by any simple restatement or return but by establishing their rational and moral conditions in the modern age, thereby putting philosophy on entirely new foundations.

I argue that Kant's Socratism amounts to much more than having breathed new life into the Platonic "ideas" and Aristotelian "categories". Kant's doctrine of the "primacy of the practical" avows Socrates' central philosophical concern, the philosophical way of life as integral to human self-knowledge.

I also show that Kant follows the example of Socrates, drawing attention to what human beings need to know and do in order to be honest and good, thus becoming wise and virtuous. In pointing to the common moral reason that each and all possess by virtue of their humanity, Kant is able to go beyond Plato's conception of the philosopher-rule. In true Socratic fashion, there is no pretence at attempting to teach moral reason to individuals from outside their own reason, in the role of a philosopher. Any change in behaviour derives from the common moral reason which is innate to all human beings, not from some abstracted rationality which the philosopher imparts to human beings from the outside. The role of the philosopher is not to rule the people, but to goad the people into using their reason. In this way, Kant democratises Plato's philosopher ruler with the idea that philosophy should rule come to rule.

There is a straight line of descent leading from Socrates to Kant, a line which concerns Being, reason and wisdom, philosophy not as an intellectual pursuit but, more than that, as a way of life that realises the rational end of all humanity. The

central theme is conduct and what is considered the proper life of the individual as a human being.

For all of the achievements of the natural philosophers who went before him, it was Socrates who inaugurated the most important epoch of ancient Greek philosophy. By shifting the centre ground from physical explanation to moral meaning and action, Socrates infused the philosophical spirit with a moral purpose *and a practical direction*. For this reason, Socrates is merits the title of being the first philosopher, in the sense of living his life as a lover of wisdom. On the level of conduct, Socrates is the man whose life came closest to *the ideal of a wise man.*

(A strong case could be made for Pythagoras, for the very same reason (Wertheim 1997; Ferguson 2010). Pythagoras suffers from not having a Plato and an Aristotle to articulate his philosophy clearly and coherently).

Kant's Socratism is worth developing at length, since Kant's achievement is to allow us to critically appropriate the profound philosophical insights of antiquity and apply them within the modern terrain. To this extent, the Kantian revolution in philosophy is still unfolding in the world today.

Whilst the relation of Kant to Plato is clear and has been noted by scholars, the extent of Kant's Socratism has yet to be fully appreciated. Kant himself understood his philosophic aim to be Socratic, so it follows that we should seek insight into the nature of Kant's philosophy by reference to its Socratic character.

Kant explicitly places himself in the Socratic tradition. For Kant, the infinite value of a metaphysics which is constructed in conformity with a critique of pure reason lies in morally orienting the social life of human beings and in silencing objections to morality *in Socratic fashion*, that is, by the demonstrating the clearest proof of the ignorance of the objectors. (Kant CPR 1965 B xxxi*).*

In itself, the idea that Kant is Socratic seems uncontroversial. The connection of Kant with Socratic philosophy is supported by a wealth of evidence. Kant's achievement is to have breathed new life into the "ideas" of Plato in his practical

philosophy and into the "categories" of Aristotle in his theoretical philosophy. In doing this, Kant conceived himself to be working within the Socratic tradition. (Kant 1974: 34; *KGS* IX, p. 29-30). Praising Socrates for inaugurating "the most important epoch of Greek philosophy," Kant likewise sees himself as launching a new epoch in modern philosophy. This makes Kant a *Socrates redivivus,* as many have remarked (Consider the remark of Herder quoted by Gerhard Funke in *Die Aufklarung* (Einleitung, "Das Sokratische Jahrhundert"), p. 13 (Stuttgart, 1963): "Ich will. . . ihn [Kant] seiner Absicht nach Sokrates nennen und seiner Philosophic den Fortgang dieser seiner Absicht wiinschen, dass namlich, etc." For some discussions of Kant's reading of ancient philosophy see the following: Diising 1971: 5-42; Schmucker 1961: 307; Wundt 1924:pp 153ff).

The case for Kant's Socratism, however, does not rest solely or even mainly on the new life that Kant breathed into the Platonic "ideas" and Aristotelian "categories". Kant's doctrine of the "primacy of the practical" highlights the emphasis on the practical as the central philosophical concern of Socrates. Kant's Socratism is *practical* as well as theoretical, and concerns moral philosophy as an *ethos,* as the philosophical way of life as integral to human self-knowledge, as living the examined life.

With Kant, there is no pretence at attempting to teach moral reason to individuals from the outside, in the role of a philosopher. Rather, Kant points to the common moral reason that each and all possess by virtue of their humanity. In this respect, Kant follows the example of Socrates, arguing that the attention of reason is drawn to its own principle, showing human beings what they need to know and do in order to be honest and good, and thus become wise and virtuous. (Kant 1959), p. 20; KGS IV, p. 404.) But any change in behaviour derives from the common moral reason innate to human beings, not from some abstracted rationality given to human beings by the philosopher.

Science and philosophy as mere intellectual pursuits are not enough for the moral life required for human self-realisation. Socrates was therefore concerned to emphasise the relation of knowledge to the conduct of life. The mere theoretician, whom Socrates calls the *philodoxus,* is concerned only with the pursuit of speculative knowledge. Socrates went much further than this in his concern that knowledge should contribute to the ultimate, moral, end of human reason. (Kant 1974; KGS IX, p. 24*).*

But Kant saw his relation to the Socratic tradition as involving much more than *ethos* as a way of life. The primary argumentation of the *Critique* reveals Kant's key Socratic concern to be whether and how metaphysics could become a science with recognized methods and results. (CPR 1965 B xiv—xv, xxii.). Kant would thus come to call philosophy a "scientific" metaphysics.

> How come I then to predicate of that which happens something quite different, and to apprehend that the concept of cause, though not contained in it, yet belongs, and indeed necessarily belongs to it? What is here the unknown X which gives support to the understanding when it believes that it can discover outside the concept A a predicate B foreign to this concept, which it yet at the same time considers to be connected with it? It cannot be experience, because the suggested principle has connected the second representation with the first, not only with greater universality, but also with the character of necessity, and therefore completely *a priori* and on the basis of mere concepts. Upon such synthetic, that is, ampliative principles, all our *a priori* speculative knowledge must ultimately rest; analytic judgments are very important, and indeed necessary, but only for obtaining that clearness in the concepts which is requisite for such a sure and wide synthesis as will lead to a genuinely new addition to all previous knowledge.
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> CPR 1965, B xiv

For Kant, metaphysics is the attempt on the part of pure reason to answer questions which it gives to itself. And so we have the question: '*How is metaphysics, as natural disposition, possible?'*

> that is, how from the nature of universal human reason do those questions arise which pure reason propounds to itself, and which it is impelled by its own need to answer as best it can?

Neither questions nor answers are established with the assistance of "experience."

First of all, it has to be noted that mathematical propositions, strictly so called, are always judgments *a priori,* not empirical; because they carry with them necessity, which cannot be derived from experience.

CPR 1965, B xv

Kant defines metaphysics as *metaphysica naturalis*, referring to a natural disposition to ask and attempt to answer such questions according to pure reason. This, for Kant, is a universal feature of human reason and transcends scientific knowledge and the 'empirical employment of reason':

Yet, in a certain sense, this *kind of knowledge* is to be looked upon as given; that is to say, metaphysics actually exists, if not as a science, yet still as natural disposition *(metaphysica naturalis).* For human reason, without being moved merely by the idle desire for extent and variety of knowledge, proceeds impetuously, driven on by an inward need, to questions such as cannot be answered by any empirical employment of reason, or by principles thence derived. Thus in all men, as soon as their reason has become ripe for speculation, there has always existed and will always continue to exist some kind of metaphysics.

CPR, B xxi-xxii.

Whilst metaphysics as a natural disposition is not a discovery that can be credited to individual philosophers, philosophy as "cognition *in abstracto"* can be credited to the ancient Greeks, including certain individuals among them. (Kant 1974: 31ff.; KGS IX, pp. 21ff.) Kant's point here is that since we cannot credit any philosophers with the discovery of metaphysics - not Thales, not Anaximenes, not Anaximander and not Parmenides - the greatest esteem must go to the individual who discovered the truest form of philosophizing. This, for Kant, is Socrates. Socrates is more than an ethical teacher, giving answers in a didactic manner, but is a dialogic philosopher who shows us the correct way of stating the question *about* metaphysics. It is in this respect that Socrates can be considered the first philosopher. Socrates was the first to reveal the connection between metaphysics, in becoming a concern of "science," or of "the

learned," and the practical concerns of ordinary men and women. (Aristotle, *Metaphysics q8jb i* ff.) In like manner, Kant did not so much teach philosophy as encourage us – and show us - how to philosophize. This is expressed in Kant's motto of enlightenment - *"Sapere aude",* 'Have the courage to use your own reason!' For Kant, as will be made clear, the role of the philosopher was not to teach philosophy but to goad individuals into using their own reason, thus becoming in some way philosophers themselves. Ultimately, humanity would not stand in need of Plato's Philosopher-Ruler since, with all becoming philosophers, philosophy itself would rule.

In ascertaining the precise nature of Kant's Socratism, we need to establish the extent to which Kant's way of seeing "the problem of metaphysics" follows the Socratic way. Further, we need to establish the extent to which any such Socratism as may be identified conditions or is a premise of the primary "critical" argumentation of Kant's work.

It can be stated clearly from the first, for reasons given above, that Kant's Socratism is a transformation rather than repetition of Socrates. Kant's philosophy is wholly modern and quite distinct from any version of Socratism to be found in the ancient schools. However, the Socratic connection is there. Kant effected a revolution in philosophy by breathing new life into Platonic 'ideas' and Aristotelian 'categories'. The 'new' in this 'new life' is Kant's own, unique 'Socratic' achievement. Kant didn't just revive Plato's 'ideas' but produced a new, original doctrine of "ideas". This is how Kant understood his relation to Socrates, as a philosopher who understands his predecessor "better than he has understood himself." (CPR, A 314/6 370.)

Kant himself was explicit about the wholly non-traditional, and to this extent, non-Socratic aspects of his philosophical endeavour. Kant claimed originality in attempting a "critique of reason" as the necessary propaedeutic to metaphysics. (CPR, A 314/6 370; A11/B25ff.,A841/B869). The attempt to extend our knowledge into the first causes and principles of Being must be preceded by an examination of the sources, extent, and limits of rational knowledge. Up to this point, philosophers, in accordance with a "natural" tendency of human reason, have proceeded by building their "speculative structures" before inquiring "whether the foundations are reliable." (CPR, A 314/6 370; A 5/69.) This has been the source of countless errors in metaphysics.

> Misled by such a proof of the power of reason, the demand for the extension of knowledge recognises no limits. The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, might imagine that its flight would be still easier in empty space. It was thus that Plato left the world of the senses, as setting too narrow limits to the understanding, and ventured out beyond it on the wings of the ideas, in the empty space of the pure understanding. He did not observe that with all his efforts he made no advance—meeting no resistance that might, as it were, serve as a support upon which he could take a stand, to which he could apply his powers, and so set his understanding in motion. It is, indeed, the common fate of human reason to complete its speculative structures as speedily as may be, and only afterwards to enquire whether the foundations are reliable. All sorts of excuses will then be appealed to, in order to reassure us of their solidity, or rather indeed to enable us to dispense altogether with so late and *so* dangerous an enquiry.

Hence Kant presents the critique of the pure rational faculties as "a perfectly new science, of which no one has ever even thought, the very idea of which was unknown," although Hume came closest to the idea. (Kant 1950: 9-10; *KGS* IV, pp. 261-62). Kant was very familiar with Hume's philosophy and so has knowledge of previous modern attempts to define "the limits of reason." Kant acknowledges Hume's importance, but his own questions go even further.

> That metaphysics has hitherto remained in so vacillating a state of uncertainty and contradiction, is entirely due to the fact that this problem, and perhaps even the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, has never previously been considered. Upon the solution of this problem, or upon a sufficient proof that the possibility which it desires to have explained does in fact not exist at all, depends the success or failure of metaphysics. Among philosophers, David Hume came nearest to envisaging this problem, but still was very far from conceiving it with sufficient definiteness and universality. He occupied himself exclusively with the synthetic proposition regarding the connection of an effect with its cause (*principium causalitatis*), and he

believed himself to have shown that such an *a priori* proposition is entirely impossible. If we accept his conclusions, then all that we call metaphysics is a mere delusion whereby we fancy ourselves to have rational insight into what, in actual fact, is borrowed solely from experience, and under the influence of custom has taken the illusory semblance of necessity. If he had envisaged our problem in all its universality, he would never have been guilty of this statement, so destructive of all pure philosophy. For he would then have recognised that, according to his own argument, pure mathematics, as certainly containing *a priori* synthetic propositions, would also not be possible; and from such an assertion his good sense would have saved him.

Kant's originality lies in the formulation of the hitherto unasked question: "How are a priori synthetic judgments possible?" This question contains the whole "problem of reason." It is the crucial question of the critical propaedeutic. (CPR, B19ff).

In the solution of the above problem, we are at the same time deciding as to the possibility of the employment of pure reason in establishing and developing all those sciences which contain a theoretical *a priori* knowledge of objects, and have therefore to answer the questions:
How is pure mathematics possible? How is pure science of nature possible?

It is on this question "How are a priori synthetic judgments possible?" that Kant claims to have advanced beyond antiquity: "If it had occurred to any of the ancients even to raise this question, this by itself would, up to our time, have been a powerful influence against all systems of pure reason, and would have saved us so many of those vain attempts, which have been blindly undertaken without knowledge of what it is that requires to be done." (CPR B14-15).

Natural science (physics) contains a priori *synthetic judgments as principles.* I need cite only two such judgments: that in all changes of the material world the quantity of matter remains unchanged; and that in all communication of motion, action and reaction must always be equal. Both propositions, it is evident, are not only necessary, and therefore in their origin *a priori,* but also synthetic. For in the concept of matter I do not think its permanence, but only its presence in the

> space which it occupies. I go outside and beyond the concept of matter, joining to it *a priori* in thought something which I have not thought *in* it. The proposition is not, therefore, analytic, but synthetic, and yet is thought *a priori;* and so likewise are the other propositions of the pure part of natural science.
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> CPR B18

The question of whether metaphysics as a science, that is, as a body of *a priori* synthetic knowledge, is possible depends upon us having answered the question of whether and to what extent reason can have *a priori* knowledge which goes beyond mere "analysis" of concepts, and which "synthetically" extends knowledge. (CPR B18).

> *Metaphysics,* even if we look upon it as having hitherto failed in all its endeavours, is yet, owing to the nature of human reason, a quite indispensable science, and *ought to contain a priori synthetic knowledge.* For its business is not merely to analyse concepts which we make for ourselves *a priori* of things, and thereby to clarify them analytically, but to extend our *a priori* knowledge. And for this purpose we must employ principles which add to the given concept something that was not contained in it, and through *a priori* synthetic judgments venture out so far that experience is quite unable to follow us, as, for instance, in the proposition, that the world must have a first beginning, and such like. Thus metaphysics consists, at least *in intention,* entirely of *a priori* synthetic propositions.

To determine whether Kant is as good as his claims here, we need to examine the assumptions contained in Kant's account of "the problem of reason." The Kantian question of "possibility" must also be asked of Kant himself: What assumptions make it possible for Kant to formulate the "problem" the way he does? In the context of the arguments developed in this paper, this examination should proceed in a way that has a direct bearing upon the Socratic tradition of philosophizing and the nature of Kant's own Socratism. It should be emphasised here that Kant modelled his philosophical revolution, his new science, the critical propaedeutic, upon logic. Kant considered logic to be an already existing and completed science. At the heart of the new science is a new logic: Kant's transcendental logic. Kant describes the traditional logic as "general" and as

concerned with the "rules of all thought". Applying to any object, such logic to Kant is a dead end, self-contained and unable to advance.

> That logic has already, from the earliest times, proceeded upon this sure path is evidenced by the fact that since Aristotle it has not required to retrace a single step, unless, indeed, we care to count as improvements the removal of certain needless subtleties or the clearer exposition of its recognised teaching, features which concern the elegance rather than the certainty of the science. It is remarkable also that to the present day this logic has not been able to advance a single step, and is thus to all appearance a closed and completed body of doctrine.
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> CPR B viii.

Logic is capable of completion, since its subject matter is the understanding itself. The understanding is able to give a complete account of its own operations, which form the content of the logical doctrine. However, through an *inspectio mentis,* the understanding cannot oversee the nature and extent of objects given to it from outside itself.

> We do not enlarge but disfigure sciences, if we allow them to trespass upon one another's territory. The sphere of logic is quite precisely delimited; its sole concern is to give an exhaustive exposition and a strict proof of the formal rules of all thought, whether it be *a priori* or empirical, whatever be its origin or its object, and whatever hindrances, accidental or natural, it may encounter in our minds.
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> That logic should have been thus successful is an advantage which it owes entirely to its limitations, whereby it is justified in abstracting—indeed, it is under obligation to do so—from all objects of knowledge and their differences, leaving the understanding nothing to deal with save itself and its form. But for reason to enter on the sure path of science is, of course, much more difficult, since it has to deal not with itself alone but also with objects. Logic, therefore, as a propaedeutic, forms, as it were, only the vestibule of the sciences; and when we are concerned with specific modes of knowledge, while logic is indeed

presupposed in any critical estimate of them, yet for the actual acquiring of them we have to look to the sciences properly and objectively so called.

CPR B ix

Kant is attempting to resolve the problems of metaphysics with respect to reason, its claims and its limits. The resolution of the question determines the extent of human knowledge. The secure foundation of metaphysics lies in knowing the limits of reason.

While I am saying this I can fancy that I detect in the face of the reader an expression of indignation, mingled with contempt, at pretensions seemingly so arrogant and vain-glorious. Yet they are incomparably more moderate than the claims of all those writers who on the lines of the usual programme profess to prove the simple nature of the soul or the necessity of a first beginning of the world. For while such writers pledge themselves to extend human knowledge beyond all limits of possible experience, I humbly confess that this is entirely beyond my power. I have to deal with nothing save reason itself and its pure thinking; and to obtain complete knowledge of these, there is no need to go far afield, since I come upon them in my own self. Common logic itself supplies an example, how all the simple acts of reason can be enumerated completely and systematically. The subject of the present enquiry is the [kindred] question, how much we can hope to achieve by reason, when all the material and assistance of experience are taken away.

CPR B ix

Are we so far removed here from Socrates, the man who was wisest of all in *knowing that he did not know*? To answer clearly in the affirmative would be hasty, however, given the way that Kant defined the limits of reason via a transcendental logic of experience.

Kant articulated the possibility of a final resolution of the problems of metaphysics by means of an analogy between reason's self-knowledge of its "pure" logical

employment and such self-knowledge reason might acquire by way of its pure employment in metaphysics.

Kant affirms the possibility that reason can fully know its own powers. However:

> since all attempts which have hitherto been made to answer these natural questions—for instance, whether the world has a beginning or is from eternity—have always met with unavoidable contradictions, we cannot rest satisfied with the mere natural disposition to metaphysics, that is, with the pure faculty of reason itself, from which, indeed, some sort of metaphysics (be it what it may) always arises.
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> CPR B 22

Therefore:

> It must be possible for reason to attain to certainty whether we know or do not know the objects of metaphysics, that is, to come to a decision either in regard to the objects of its enquiries or in regard to the capacity or incapacity of reason to pass any judgment upon them, so that we may either with confidence extend our pure reason or set to it sure and determinate limits.
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> CPR B 22

Kant here affirms the possibility that reason could ascertain the extent of its knowledge with respect to the objects of metaphysics and hence come to know the "limits" of its powers. The problems of metaphysics do not derive from the objects of reason but from within reason itself, since they "are imposed upon it by its own nature, not by the nature of things which are distinct from it." (B 23).

With Kant's transcendental "logic of experience", this perspective would appear to take us far away from Socratism in its ancient form. Kant, however, highlights the Socratic element in his thinking within the propaedeutical function ascribed to this transcendental logic.

These questions concern not the ‘monopoly of the schools’ of philosophy but the "interests of humanity," (CPR Bxxxii). Kant invests "humanity" in this sense with a moral force greater than any other questions; for their solution "the mathematician would gladly exchange the whole of his science." (CPR A463/8491.) The non-sceptical solutions to these questions "are so many foundation stones of morals and religion," so that speculative metaphysics "promises a secure foundation for our highest expectations in respect of those ultimate ends towards which all the endeavours of reason must ultimately converge." (A466/B494,A463/B491.) In a section entitled ‘The Canon of Pure Reason’, contained in the Transcendental Doctrine of Method, Kant concludes his strategy for solving the problem of metaphysics by demonstrating that Critical philosophy is able to bring harmony to reason and thus validate the moral order through its vindication of the metaphysics of experience and its criticism of transcendent metaphysics. The Canon therefore outlines the contours of the future development of the Critical system, the architecture of which is built upon three key questions:

1 What can I know?
2 What ought I to do?
3 What may I hope?

(Kant A 804-5/B 832-33.)

These three question combine all the interests of reason. Kant provides an account of metaphysics which establishes an architectonic principle for all of reason. In Kant’s judgment, the definition of philosophy he presents on this basis is Socratic. He reasons that "the whole equipment of reason" is determined by nature to find the solution to metaphysical problems. All metaphysics issues in the practical "ideas" of God, freedom, and immortality, the supports of morality. (8 395,A 800/8 828.)

> These unavoidable problems set by pure reason itself are *God, freedom,* and *immortality.* The science which, with all its preparations, is in its final intention directed solely to their solution is metaphysics..

Kant CPR 1982: 47

Kant means by this that the whole of reason is naturally (rather than contingently, or conventionally) determined toward the discovery of the foundations of morality, or towards the elaboration of the theoretical grounds which support the hopes of rational morality in seeking to achieve its ends in the world. It is here, then, that the critical propaedeutic finds its *telos:* its task is "to level the ground [of reason] and to render it sufficiently secure for moral edifices." (A 319/B 376.) Without this foundation in the moral teleology of reason, the critical propaedeutic (with its "logic") is unintelligible.

Kant is a teleological thinker in a clear line of descent from the ancient philosophers who affirmed the idea that all rationality must be related to a highest organizing *telos,* moral in nature. The ancient philosophers thus conceived philosophy as the "teleology of human reason."

> "philosophy is the science of the relation of all knowledge to the essential ends of human reason . . . "

CPR A 839-40/8 867-68

Kant is probably referring here to the ancient post-Socratics, who "in the use of the term 'philosopher' meant especially the moralist" (CPR B868). This tradition defines the highest good as the achievement of the ends of morality within the natural world. Philosophy therefore concerns the scientific knowledge of the "highest good". (*Critique of Practical Reason,* Bk. II, chap. 1).

> To define this idea practically, i.e., sufficiently for the maxims of our rational conduct, is the business of practical wisdom, and this again as a science is philosophy, in the sense in which the word was understood by the ancients, with whom it meant instruction in the conception in which the *summum bonum* was to be placed, and the conduct by which it was to be obtained.

In this, Kant argues, the ancients were correct. "In moral philosophy we have not advanced beyond the ancients." (Kant 1974: 37; KGS IX, p. 32.)

The supremacy of reason as such plants a practical *telos* within philosophy, making the philosopher "the lawgiver of human reason". The philosopher legislates the systematic unity of reason, establishing the single organizing principle to which all else is subordinate. (*Vide supra,* nn. 46, 47.) As a result, Kant is able to equate reason's inherent theoretical demand for "systematic unity" with its highest "practical" demand: the demand for "purposive unity" among the aspects of rationality is "founded in the will's own essential nature." (CPR,A817/B845.) Both the systematic character of philosophy and the practical or legislative character of philosophy are therefore essentially in unity as two aspects of the same thing. Kant's claim is that philosophy alone "gives systematic unity to all other sciences" and hence is "the only science which has systematic coherence in the proper sense." (Kant 1974:. 28; KGS IX, p. 24.) Only that which *gives* systematic unity properly *has* such unity itself. And that, for Kant, is philosophy. Since legislative-practical reason endows philosophy/science with systematic unity, it follows that this same reason will both demand and effect the completion of metaphysics as science. (CPR A, xiii-xiv.)

> It is a call to reason to undertake anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge, and to institute a tribunal which will assure to reason its lawful claims, and dismiss all groundless pretensions, not by despotic decrees, but in accordance with its own eternal and unalterable laws. This tribunal is no other than the *critique of pure reason.*

What should be noted here is the Socratic concern with self-knowledge, the examined life as a self-examination which proceeds according to one's own innate reason rather than is given didactically from the outside.

> I do not mean by this a critique of books and systems, but of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all knowledge after which it may strive *independently of all experience.* It will therefore decide as to the possibility or

impossibility of metaphysics in general, and determine its sources, its extent, and its limits—all in accordance with principles.

CPR A xii.

The demand that wholeness be attained thus makes necessary the "completion" of metaphysics. Reason cannot be a true ‘whole’ so long as certain natural questions of reason must remain unanswered. Kant underlines the practical character of this legislative setting of limits with language concerning its "negative" implications for speculative reason. The critique's (or propaedeutic's) primary use is negative.

But, it will be asked, what sort of a treasure is this that we propose to bequeath to posterity? What is the value of the metaphysics that is alleged to be thus purified by criticism and established once for all? On a cursory view of the present work it may seem that its results are merely *negative,* warning us that we must never venture with speculative reason beyond the limits of experience. Such is in fact its primary use.

"It is therefore the first and most important task of philosophy to deprive metaphysics, once and for all, of its injurious influence, by attacking its errors at their very source" (CPR B xxxi). Only when the foundations are secure will metaphysics come into its own.

In view of all these considerations, we arrive at the idea of a special science which can be entitled the Critique of Pure Reason. For reason is the faculty which supplies the principles of *a priori* knowledge. Pure reason is, therefore, that which contains the principles whereby we know anything absolutely *a priori.* An organon of pure reason would be the sum-total of those principles according to which all modes of pure *a priori* knowledge can be acquired and actually brought into being. The exhaustive application of such an organon would give rise to a system of pure reason. But as this would be asking rather much, and as it is still doubtful whether, and in what cases, any extension of our knowledge be here possible, we can regard a science of the mere examination of pure reason, of its sources and limits, as the *propaedeutic* to the system of pure reason. As such, it

should be called a critique, not a doctrine, of pure reason. Its utility, in speculation, ought properly to be only negative, not to extend, but only to clarify our reason, and keep it free from errors—which is already a very great gain. I entitle *transcendental* all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible *a priori.* A system of such concepts might be entitled transcendental philosophy.

CPR A 11-12/B 25

Since the "injurious" dialectic of metaphysics endangers the attainment of the highest moral end, the elimination of metaphysical error takes precedence over the pursuit of knowledge unfettered by practical considerations.

The critique (or propaedeutic) has more than a negative use. Kant thus moves from the ‘negative’ implications to the ‘positive’, the way that the sweeping away of error opens up the possibility of the practical employment of reason. Kant establishes the basis of a practical ethics.

But such teaching at once acquires a *positive* value when we recognise that the principles with which speculative reason ventures out beyond its proper limits do not in effect *extend* the employment of reason, but, as we find on closer scrutiny, inevitably *narrow* it. These principles properly belong [not to reason but] to sensibility, and when thus employed they threaten to make the bounds of sensibility coextensive with the real, and so to supplant reason in its pure (practical) employment. So far, therefore, as our Critique limits speculative reason, it is indeed *negative;* but since it thereby removes an obstacle which stands in the way of the employment of practical reason, nay threatens to destroy it, it has in reality a *positive* and very important use. At least this is so, immediately we are convinced that there is an absolutely necessary *practical* employment of pure reason—the *moral*—in which it inevitably goes beyond the limits of sensibility. Though [practical] reason, in thus proceeding, requires no assistance from speculative reason, it must yet be assured against its opposition, that reason may not be brought into conflict with itself. To deny

that the service which the Critique renders is *positive* in character, would thus be like saying that the police are of no positive benefit, inasmuch as their main business is merely to prevent the violence of which citizens stand in mutual fear, in order that each may pursue his vocation in peace and security.

CPR B xxv

There is nothing 'empty' or merely formal about Kant's theoretical concerns. In delineating the absolutely necessary *practical* employment of pure reason, Kant establishes the foundations for *moral* praxis, something which goes beyond the givenness and determinism of the world of sense experience. Kant's philosophy is fundamentally practical in its orientation. Kant's philosophy is a philosophy which is located within the world, transforming it from within and developing it in a moral direction via the *telos* of human reason. Reason itself is the faculty which undertakes the critique of reason, reason operating by its own compulsion through the combination of its practical requirement of systematic wholeness (the realization of the *telos* of moral freedom in the "moral world") and its experience of frustration in the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of this end. (Kant 1950: 75; KGS IV, p. 327.)

The establishing of the "limit" or *quid juris* is the stipulation that these pure sciences are the only sciences which "extend" knowledge, thus providing a *criterion* for the possible extension of knowledge. Speculative metaphysics fails to meet this stipulation. (CPR B xvff.) It is in this respect that Kant criticises Plato for taking flight beyond the world of the senses, as setting too narrow limits to the understanding, and flying on the wings of the ideas into 'the empty space of the pure understanding.' In correcting the error of speculative metaphysics, Kant's concern is less with the "internal teleology" of these pure sciences than with their critical employment in the propaedeutic, seeking the practical end of reason (metaphysics).

We can now establish the distinctive character of Kant's Socratism with greater clarity. Kant recovered and established on firmer foundations the Socratic conception of philosophy as being essentially directed towards the knowledge of ultimate ends (the good, what Kant calls the *summum bonum).* In this regard, Kant is quite distinct from other modern philosophers whose Socratism came with a "theodicean" dimension. Kant's

Socratism holds that the metaphysical elaboration of the good does not differentiate the philosopher from common opinion with respect to highest ends. Philosophers such as Hume had already placed all human activity on the plane of passion, thereby subverting the distinction between the true rational good and the merely apparent good of passion. Against this, Kant unites all humankind at the level of the "natural metaphysical" interest. The "interests of humanity," (CPR Bxxxii) is satisfied not speculatively, but only through the "practical" achievement of a "moral world." Establishing the good as the highest end, Kant holds that common "moral belief" is the surest guide to the nature of the good, in that moral belief leads unerringly to the organizing *telos* of all rational activity, thus bringing about the highest end. Moral belief is therefore the ground of the true non-speculative "metaphysics." It follows from this that ". . . in matters which concern all men without distinction nature is not guilty of any partial distribution of gifts, and … in regard to the essential ends of human nature the highest philosophy can not advance further than is possible under the guidance which nature has bestowed upon the most ordinary understanding." (CPR A 831/B 859).

This is a crucial argument in establishing Kant's ethical position as not only practical but democratic. Nature distributes moral reason evenly throughout the human species. Nature has bestowed her gifts upon 'all men [and women] without distinction'.

Plato's Socratism sought to liberate the soul from conventional fetters and therefore involved the philosophical critique of common moral belief and opinion. Kant's Socratism is of a different character. Kant conceives common 'moral belief' to be the surest guide to the nature of the good, being inherently connected to the organizing *telos* of all rational activity. Plato and Kant are diametrically opposed in this regard. Avowing the commonness of the highest *telos,* Kant affirms the capacity of human beings to apprehend the nature of the good and thus refutes the Platonic imperative to leave the "cave" of opinion in order to see the natural light of truth. Plato's prisoners are capable of seeing the light by virtue of their own innate moral reason.

One should be careful of establishing too sharp a contrast here. Kant's philosophy is democratic in the sense that he holds that all humankind, by virtue of innate reason, is capable of apprehending the moral truth of the good. In this respect, Kant's philosophy envisages a notion of philosopher-rulers, the democratic idea that philosophy should

rule via the realisation of the natural reason which is innate in each and all. This contrasts with the potential elitism which is inherent in Plato's idea of the philosopher-ruler. Kant subverts any such theoretico-elitist model of truth in favour of a practical and democratic conception which is grounded in the natural teleology of reason. But it nevertheless remains the case that Kant and Plato share a commitment to the true and the good as well as to their realisation. Eschewing any simple distinction between opinion and knowledge, mass and elite, Kant's more optimistic assessment of the rational faculties of human beings leads him to repudiate the pessimistic aspects of Plato's metaphysics of the cave. For Kant, nature has given human beings the capacity to liberate themselves via their own reason. Human beings are capable of being philosophers and therefore do not stand in need of a philosopher ruler bringing them reason from the outside. Enlightenment comes from within the world of Becoming, not from outside in the form of the elite knowledge gained in the world of Being.

To be fair to Plato, his allegory of the cave is a simplification of Plato's full argument. Plato also affirmed the innate reason of all human beings, and was really arguing that human beings are in need of philosophy so that reason could rule. Plato's philosophy is itself dialogic rather than didactic, with Plato writing in the form of dialogues, emphasising that individuals need to philosophise, actually do philosophy for themselves, rather than rely on a philosopher-ruler merely teaching truths.

Kant gives us a Socrates for a new, democratic age and thus subverts the potentials for any theoretico-elitist model within the old metaphysical tradition. For Kant, this tradition has failed to live up to the practical and sceptical spirit of ancient Socratism. (Tonelli 1967: 118, nn. 32 and 37. Also KGS XXIV ("Blomberg Logic") par. 178, p. 212.) Indeed, Kant argues that Socrates himself had failed to subordinate metaphysics to a universal *telos,* to the 'interests of humanity', a deficiency which is concomitant with the ancient failure to understand the requirements of a scientific metaphysics.

Kant himself does not identify this defect in the ancient Socrates, using "Socrates" as a metaphor capable of symbolising the new era in philosophy. Thus Kant sees himself as completing rather than repudiating the philosophical endeavours of the ancient philosophers. His point is that the true nature and scope of this philosophical project had been but faintly perceived in antiquity. In this respect, Kant does not condemn the

Socratic tradition for having erred but considers such errors to be the flawed ruminations of an early, untutored wisdom. Kant saw himself as having grounded this wisdom in well-articulated arguments. In this respect, Kant shared the fundamental condescension of the Enlightenment towards all antiquity. Kant believed in "progress" in a philosophic sense, as distinct from technical or other forms of progress. For Kant, such progress implied the elimination of the distinction between philosophic and non-philosophic reason, i.e., the ancient distinction between *nous* (knowledge) and *doxa* (opinion), through the attainment of wisdom on the part of the whole species. If philosophy is conceived essentially to be a way of life that begins anew with each philosopher, with the *telos* of philosophy located in that life, or in the activity of the mind that that life makes possible, then philosophy cannot be considered to be essentially progressive. Kant is concerned to repudiate this view. Philosophy, for Kant, is essentially progressive; there is such a thing as philosophic progress. The ancients did not know this, claims Kant, evincing a naive standpoint with respect to nature in general, as in the "nature" of the philosopher and distinctions between this "nature" and other "natures". (*Critique of Practical Reason,* Bk. II, chap. 2, sec. 5)

This is no mere philosophical quibbling but centres on the crucial point with respect to philosophizing as a way of life which realises the end of rational human nature. The notion of philosophical virtue in antiquity rests on an error which is common to all of the Greek schools, that is, the reliance on the merely natural use of human powers. The Greeks would speak of the ‘natural character’ which distinguishes this person as this and that person as that. A person could be a ‘natural’ philosopher, a ‘natural’ politician, a ‘natural’ soldier and so on. Aristotle wrote of those who are slaves ‘by nature’.

> For the element that can use its intelligence to look ahead is by nature ruler and by nature master, while that which has the bodily strength to do the actual work is by nature a slave, one of those who are ruled. Thus there is a common interest uniting master and slave.
>
> Aristotle P 1981: 56/7

Whilst the cultivation of the virtues and the excellences remains valid in terms of human flourishing, the problem with the ancient way of speaking about nature is seen clearly in Aristotle's view that a human being is something 'by nature' and in Plato's notion of fitting individuals to the tasks for which their natures are best suited. Such a conception easily fits not a meritocracy but an organised hierarchical functionalism that fails to respect what Kant calls the 'interests of humanity' and fails to recognise the even distribution of nature's gift of moral reason amongst all individuals. Nature, as Marx would come to argue after Kant, has a history. In this sense, human beings make themselves what they are by developing their essences within historically specific social relations. (Meikle 1985).

Thus, the ancient Greek reasoning 'by nature' is simplistic. Kant demonstrates that nature is "nature" only when subject to universal "laws." Kant, in this sense, is concerned to democratise the idea of virtue by revaluing the rational faculties of all humankind. The error of the ancients lies in the assumption that philosophic autonomy can be achieved without the subordination of the philosopher's own use of reason to "universal maxims." The ancient philosopher considers himself capable of achieving autonomy through the employment of the "gifts" given to him and his like by nature. However, since philosophy is law-giving itself and not just another natural phenomenon, it follows that no natural kind can claim to be a philosophical kind. Philosophy is essentially a doctrine of "ends," demonstrating how ends are achieved through rational legislation. This legislation is universal in scope, meaning that philosophy can be concerned only with universal ends. This is the central aspect of Kant's philosophy and leads beyond nature to "history." Reason doesn't just have a nature, it has a history. There is a future state to be attained, towards which humanity must progress in order to realise its own natural end. The end is the philosophic legislation of universal ends, to be achieved by the species as a whole. This is not yet a "fact" but is to be made a fact by human action. Through moral praxis, human agents realise the rational end inherent in the teleology of nature. The attainment of this end depends upon the universal comprehension and implementation of certain, 'critical' doctrines.

> *In man* (as the only rational creature on earth), *those natural capacities which are directed towards the use of his reason are such that they could be fully developed only in the species, but not in the individual.* Reason, in a creature, is a faculty

which enables that creature to extend far beyond the limits of natural instinct the rules and intentions it follows in using its various powers, and the range of its projects is unbounded. But reason does not itself work instinctively, for it requires trial, practice and instruction to enable it to progress gradually from one stage of insight to the next. Accordingly, every individual man would have to live for a vast length of time if he were to learn how to make complete use of all his natural capacities; or if nature has fixed only a short term for each man's life (as is in fact the case), then it will require a long, perhaps incalculable series of generations, each passing on its enlightenment to the next, before the germs implanted by nature in our species can be developed to that degree which corresponds to nature's original intention.

Kant UH Second Proposition Reiss ed 1996

No matter how much a philosopher 'by nature' achieves by his or her own reason, s/he cannot achieve his own "autonomy" independently of "history," or independently of the human species as a whole. What matters is the progress of the whole species towards true autonomy. A philosopher cannot be satisfied by the condition of reason in the species that falls short of this end.

Kant's 'new Socrates' identifies 'criticism' as the proper use of metaphysics. Theoretical reason thus "serves to remove obstacles in the way of religion and virtue" through a critique of speculation, "and which has more to do with dispensing than with acquiring." (KGS XVII, Reflection 4457, p. 558) "Metaphysics is a useful science, not because it extends knowledge, but because it prevents errors. One learns what Socrates knew." (KGS XVII, Reflection 3717, p. 261). For Kant, "metaphysics… is only the correction of the sound understanding and reason." (KGS XVII, Reflection 4284, p. 495). Such notions reflect Kant's reworking of metaphysics. Kant's scientific metaphysics does not pertain to the science of the natural whole. Rather, it is the science of the faculty of reason, bringing theoretical knowledge into harmony with "common reason" through an account of the limits of the former and an affirmation of the 'wisdom' of the latter. "Common reason" furnishes the "wisdom" about the ends which guides the use of theoretical reason. In this respect, we can characterise Kant's Socratism as an inverted Platonism, retaining Plato's commitment to the true, the good and the beautiful, but

seeing the potential for their realisation in the rational faculties innate in each individual and all individuals. Where Plato saw the errors of opinion, *doxa,* Kant sees the 'common reason'.

Earlier, I argued that Kant replaced Plato's notion of the philosopher ruler with the democratic notion that philosophy should rule through the attainment of the natural rational ends of the whole species. This view needs qualification. Whilst "wisdom" rules over "science," wisdom is not the preserve of philosophy. Scientific "metaphysics," however, is an instrument which the philosopher employs in order to assist the common reason in realising its ends. This means that the philosopher is distinguished from "common reason" with respect to means only, not with respect to ends. (KGS XVII, Reflections 4453,4459; KGS II, pp. 368-69.) The democratisation of Plato's philosopher-ruler as the idea that philosophy should rule stands. The role of the philosopher is not to rule but to act as a spur to human self-knowledge, showing human beings how little they need beyond their own innate reason in order to achieve their ends. (KGS XVII; Reflections 4453,4459; KGS II, pp. 368-69.) In this sense, Plato's world of Being is shown to be immanent in the rational faculties of human beings, the common reason, as part of the process of Becoming.

Kant, the epitome of the professional philosopher, thus undercuts claims to the superiority of theoretical reason, showing human beings how little they need with respect to theory if they just rely on their common moral reason. (KGS XXIV, pp. 212,330.) Kant's Socratic spur to human self-knowledge is also a legislating of the difference between wisdom about ends which arises from common moral reason, and theoretical knowledge or science. (KGS XVIII, Reflection 4902).

The question arises as to why the unerring wisdom of the common moral reason should require the metaphysical criticism of the philosopher. What use could such 'criticism' be? There is a need to emphasise here Kant's awareness of the uniqueness of the modern world: "We live in an age which has not had its like before in the history of the human understanding." (KGS XVIII, Reflection 6215, pp. 504-5.) A substantial part of the distinctiveness of the age in which Kant wrote consisted in the extraordinary advances being recorded in the pure theoretical sciences of nature and mathematics. This awareness lies behind the striking passage in *Critique of Practical Reason.*

"Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe .. the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."

Kant (1788). In L. W. Beck ed. 1949: 258.

Unusual for Kant, the words have a poetic ring. Of course, the words are not poetry, but refer to Kant's attempts to unify science and morals, the knowledge of external nature and human nature, Newton and Rousseau.

Kant learned from Rousseau to be wary of any attempt to 'enlighten' society through the diffusion of scientific thought throughout society. Reason comes in many forms, not just scientific. After Rousseau had sounded the alarm, Kant was acutely aware of the possible anarchic consequences of the attempt to spread 'enlightenment' by means of just the one form of reason. Kant identifies the central difficulty of the modern age as lying in the "public display" of speculative doctrines which are pernicious to the moral health of society. He thus writes of the "injurious influence" of philosophic thought in the contemporary world. Kant's criticism here has nothing in common at all with the reactionary rejection of the Enlightenment, quite the contrary. Kant insists that the magnitude of the danger compels us to present an adequate account of the structure of reason, and to develop adequate safeguards of common moral reason. The result is therefore ultimately beneficial to the species as a whole.

Kant is aware of living in times that are without precedent in this regard. Philosophy, what Kant refers to as "scientific" metaphysics, is now responsible for the "lasting welfare" of humankind as a whole, and answerable to the people at the same time. Kant strikes a dramatic note here which is untypical for a philosopher who is normally so dry. He states that the modern age is either the dawn of the permanent decline of man, the "complete decay of the human understanding" and "human shape," or is the dawn of a permanent resolution of human problems. (Letters to M. Mendelssohn, April 8, 1766, and J. Lambert, December 31,1765; also KGS XX p 48, lines 1-7, and KGS XVIII, Reflection 4936). Aren't these the alternatives before us now? As a spur to bring about the desirable end state and make the potential for human progress an historical fact, Kant's philosophy is timely. This is crisis as an opportunity. We are living in those times today. Kant argues that the way out of the

crisis of the present age lies in the critique of the rational faculties. The "historical situation" within which Kant found himself was clearly a powerful force behind his "transcendental turn," to the extent that, as was argued earlier, this turn is based on the requirement that theoretical inquiry is subordinated to the universal "common moral reason" along with the *telos* that accompanies it. It is this subordination which lies behind Kant's transcendental turn, requiring the "horizontal critique" of speculation achieved by means of a "transcendental logic." As a result, the 'common moral reason' is enlightened as to the limits of speculation, and comes to learn and develop its own sufficiency in the moral-teleological realm.

Bibliography

ABBREVIATIONS

In the text, the following abbreviations of Kant's work have been used.

PP	*Perpetual Peace* in Reiss ed 1991
UH	*Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* in Reiss ed
CF	*Contest of the Faculties* in Reiss ed
TP	*Theory and Practice* in Reiss ed
WE	*What is Enlightenment?* in Reiss ed
GMM	*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
R	*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*
DV	*Doctrine of Virtue*
LE	*Lectures on Ethics*
A	*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*
CJ	*Critique of Judgment*
MEJ	*The Metaphysical Elements of Justice*
Saw	*On the Old Saw: That May Be Right in Theory But It Won't Work in Practice*
CPuR	*Critique of Pure Reason*
CPrR	*Critique of Practical Reason*

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