KANT'S CRITIQUE OF METAPHYSICS: AN EXPOSITORY AND EVALUATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Kant's metaphysics of experience undoubtedly revolutionized both metaphysics and epistemology by exposing the conditions of possibility of knowledge, cognizing objective experience. It constitutes a major milestone in understanding the a priori conditions for knowing objects, as determined by the pure forms of sensibility, namely: space and time, and the categories of the faculty of understanding. However, by repositioning metaphysics to the sphere of objective experience and assigning it the task of warranting the a priori principles of empirical knowledge, the question is asked whether metaphysics still remains a legitimate discourse with regard to understanding reality, apart from all sensible experience? This paper proceeds through a qualitative research method, by critically analyzing and evaluating primary and secondary sources on Kant's critique of metaphysics. It argues that the ambiguity in Kant's use of the term "metaphysics," which is itself connected to the ambiguity in his account of the categories, leaves the question of its legitimacy as regards knowledge of objects inconclusive.

Introduction

Kant's project in the *Critique of Pure Reason* revolves around the central question of the nature and possibility of metaphysics and the role of reason in warranting knowledge claims. Invariably, the Critique constitutes a response to the unending disputes about whether and to what extent the human faculty (understanding and reason taken together) is capable of any knowledge, independently of experience (the problem of skepticism). Put differently, Kant attempts to account for the rational or a *priori* foundations or structures of human knowledge, thereby establishing the autonomy of the knowing subject, without dissociating those foundations from the limits of experience. Thus, the central question which permeates the entire Critique is how the synthetic a *priori* propositions/judgments are possible. Kant's treatment of this question runs through his entire theoretical philosophy. Our aim, here, is not an exhaustive exposition of this philosophy, an impossible task within the limits of this paper. Rather, we are primarily concerned with his critique of metaphysics, as one aspect of that central question. Hence, this paper pursues a twofold objective: to make a concise exposition of Kant's critique of metaphysics, and to offer an evaluation of that critique. To this end, the first and second sections examine Kant's reconstruction of metaphysics and/or doctrine of the categories (Transcendental Analytic) and his critique of pure reason (Transcendental Dialectic) respectively. The third and last section offers an appraisal of Kant's treatment of metaphysics.

I. Kant's Reconstruction of General Metaphysics and Transcendental Analytic

The *Critique*[1] is a response to a prevalent metaphysics in the

[1] All citations of the *Critique* of *Pure Reason* in this work are taken from or based on Guyer-Wood translation, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and

> eighteenth-century, namely, the rationalist metaphysics of Leibniz-Wolffian tradition, founded on the principle of contradiction alone, and articulated through logical containment relations among concepts.[2] Thus, the central question it aims to address is: "what and how much can the understanding and reason know apart from all experience?" In Kant's view, a purely conceptual metaphysics, like the Leibniz-Wolffian metaphysics, is expressive only of analytic truths, thereby leaving out a large portion of synthetic judgments necessary for any system of science.

It is important to note here that Kant's preoccupation with metaphysics is to establish its nature and possibility, by investigating the role of reason in it. He intends to show how it formed the basis for science. However, the metaphysics he is concerned with is not the speculative isolated metaphysics in which reason, because it separates itself from experience and proceeds entirely through concepts (like the Wolffian metaphysics), continuously gets stuck, but instead a metaphysics in which objects conform to our cognition, making it possible to establish an a priori cognition of these objects. (B xv) Thus, his proposed solution is the treatment of the question: How are synthetic judgments a priori possible? To understand the central problem of metaphysics which is the question of the possibility of synthetic a priori judgments, it is necessary, according to Kant, to distinguish between analytic and synthetic judgments. (B 19)

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ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[2] R. Lanier Anderson, "The Introduction to the *Critique*: Framing the Question," in *The Cambridge Companion to K*ant's C*ritique of* P*ure* R*eason*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), 75.

1. The Analytic-Synthetic Distinction

a. Analytic Judgments

Analytic judgments, also known as "judgments of clarification," are those in which the relation of the subject to the predicate is thought through identity; the predicate belongs to the subject intrinsically or is contained in it. For example, in the proposition: "All bodies are extended," which Kant schematically renders as "To everything x to which the concept of the body (a + b) belongs, belongs also extension (b),"[3] the relation of the subject 'body' and the predicate 'extension' is thought through identity, that is, the predicate is contained in the subject, adds nothing (positive knowledge) to the concept of body. In other words, the subject logically contains the object or the predicate. Therefore, the truth-value of these judgments is determined simply by analyzing the concept of the subject, without necessarily referencing the object. As Henry Allison puts it, "Analytic judgments provide a formal extension of knowledge by clarifying or explicating what is already implicit in a concept."[4]

b. Synthetic Judgments

Synthetic judgments, also called "judgments of amplification," are those in which the relation of the subject to the predicate mutually stands in connection, not through identity but by means of adding to or amplifying the concept of the subject. (A 6-7/B 11) In the proposition: "All bodies have attraction," schematically rendered by Kant as "To everything x, to which the concept of body (a + b)

[3] Kant, *Jäsche Logic* (9: III, §36; 607) as quoted by Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2004), 92.
[4] Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* , 92.

belongs, belongs also attraction (c),"[5] the predicate, attraction, adds positively to the concept of the subject. It materially extends the knowledge of the subject through providing a feature or determination that is not logically contained in the concept of the subject.

Consequently, whereas analytic judgments contain a logical predicate, synthetic judgments possess a determination or property. The former seem straightforward, since the reality of the predicate does not come into question, whereas the latter involve not only reference to the subject but also understanding the reality of that determination or property which extends the knowledge of the subject. For Kant, a synthetic judgment of theoretical reason materially extends our knowledge just insofar as its concepts are related to intuition that itself relates to an object.[6] Stated differently, the objective validity of the connection of the concepts of the subject and predicate thought in the synthetic judgment is dependent on their relation to the intuition of the object.

Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments suggests, as argued by Lanier Anderson, "his critical rejection of traditional metaphysical theorizing, and particularly of Wolffian claims about the powers of the principle of contradiction."[7]

a. The Question of the Possibility of Synthetic A Priori Judgment

The analytic-synthetic distinction, it is clear from the foregoing, poses the criteria for the validity and justification of cognitive claims for metaphysics, and ultimately the question of its nature and

[5] Kant, *Jäsche Logic* (9: III; 607) as quoted by Allison, Kant's *Transcendental Idealism,* 93.
[6] Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* , 93.
[7] Anderson, "The Introduction to the *Critique*: Framing the Question," 83.

possibility. Put differently, bearing in mind that, for Kant, any metaphysics worthy of its title can only be synthetic, that is, expansive of knowledge beyond what is logically contained in the concepts, and that metaphysics, by its very nature, lays claim to a priori cognition that is universal and necessary, the question asked is: is it possible for synthetic judgments to have non-empirical grounds? Formulated otherwise, "how is it possible to extend one's knowledge (in a material sense) beyond a given concept, independently of any experience of the object thought under that concept?"[8]

To answer this question, Kant argues that metaphysical inquiry must, contrary to the dogmatic approach of traditional metaphysics, begin with a critique of reason, which is the domain of "transcendental philosophy," (A12/B25) concerned not so much with objects or the nature of things in themselves as with a priori concepts or categories of objects or mode of cognition.

b. The Role of Understanding and Kant's System of Categories

In his "Transcendental Analytic," one of the divisions of "Transcendental Logic," Kant identifies the understanding as the source of a priori concepts that yield a priori cognitions when associated to the transcendental forms of sensibility, namely: space and time. In Book I, "Analytic of Concept" of this division, the understanding is considered as that which makes cognition through concepts possible, by means of judging through them. It is "a faculty for judging, […] for thinking." (A 69/ B 94) Concepts which rest on thinking, are means by which the understanding comes to cognition, and are related to judgments as their predicates. Cognition of objects, therefore, always takes the form of judgment.

[8] Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* , 94.

A distinctive feature of the Kantian system of categories is its derivation from aspects or features of judgments. Kant's Metaphysical Deduction, as developed in the section "On the Clue to the discovery of all the pure concepts of the understanding," is meant to show that the categories or the pure concepts of the understanding are arrived at through reflection on the logical functions of judgements. (A70/B95) From the four main Aristotelian classifications of judgments, namely, quantity, quality, relation, and modality, Kant arrives at twelve categories, classified into these features of judgments:

i. Under the aspect of quantity, we have universal, particular, or singular judgments, which correspond respectively to the categories of unity, plurality, and totality.
ii. Under the feature of quality, we have affirmative, negative, or infinite judgments, each of which corresponds respectively to the categories of reality, negation, and limitation.
iii. Under the feature of relation, a judgment is either categorical, hypothetical or disjunctive. From each of these are deduced the categories of inherence and subsistence, causality and dependence, and community respectively.
iv. Under the classification of modality, we have problematic, assertoric, and apodictic judgments, which correspond to the categories of possibility, existence, and necessity respectively.[9] (A 80/B 106)

According to Kant, these categories or pure concepts of understanding necessarily cover and apply to any and to the totality of experience, and, consequently, are objectively valid. Their objective validity is accounted for by the fact that knowledge of

[9] Amie Thomasson, "Categories", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/categories/>.

objects necessarily requires the application of these concepts. And objective empirical judgments or synthetic a posteriori propositions are endowed with their objectivity and generality owing to these a priori concepts embodied in the corresponding forms of judgments. To be sure, the purpose of the Transcendental Deduction is precisely to prove the objective validity of these categories, or to show how the a priori concepts constitute the basis of experiential cognition. Just as Kant established in the Transcendental Aesthetic that the objects of experience must accord with the formal conditions of sensibility that are a priori, namely, space and time, for them to be intuitable, so he argues, in the Transcendental Deduction, that they (that is, objects of experience) must conform with a priori concepts for there to be synthetic unity of thinking (A90/B123). These categories, therefore, necessarily and universally apply to all our experiences.

It is clear from the Critique that Kant's reconstructed metaphysics accords precedence or pride of place to a priori concepts with regard to their objects of experience. This repositioning of the categories of the understanding as preceding and shaping objects of sensibility in the process of knowledge acquisition is what has come to be known, both in metaphysics and epistemology, as Kant's Copernican Revolution. This means that it is the objects that conform to the a priori conditions of knowledge of the human faculty and not otherwise. Thus, Kant moves away from the popular opinion that the mind passively receives sense-experience.

As regards the categories of understanding determining the objects of experience, he clearly remarks that:

[…] all experience contains in addition to the intuition of the senses, through which something is given, a concept of an object that is given in intuition, or appears; hence concepts of objects in general lie at the ground of all experiential cognition as a priori

conditions; consequently the objective validity of the categories, as a priori concepts, rests on the fact that through them alone is experience is possible (as far as the form of thinking is concerned) (A 93/B 125–6).

Although these categories are not of things in themselves as in Aristotle's but rather of objects of possible cognition, they nevertheless "retain a certain sort of ontological import, as it is a priori that they apply universally to all objects of possible cognition" (A79/B105). What this means is that the understanding can acquire "a sort of a descriptive set of ontological categories" rooted not in the mind-independent reality but connected to forms of human judgments.[10] In this regard, the Transcendental Analytic argues against the dogmatic claims of traditional metaphysics as providing a priori knowledge. The categories of the understanding are in themselves without content, that is, they are pure forms of thought, until provided with data in sensibility. Only their empirical use, in relation to the general conditions of a possible experience, can yield cognition. Thus, attempts to use the pure forms of the understanding, independently of objects of sensibility, yield metaphysical illusions. Kant considers illicit and dialectical this "transcendental" use of the categories of the understanding. He explicitly writes: "The transcendental use of a concept in any sort of principle consists in its being related to things in general and in themselves; its empirical use, however, in its being related merely to appearances, that is, objects of a possible experience." (A 239/B 298). From the foregoing, it appears clear that the understanding, in relation to yielding cognition, can only anticipate the form of a

[10] Amie Thomasson, "Categories", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/categories/>.

possible experience; it cannot do so outside the limits of sensibility. More importantly, and bearing on the status of general metaphysics, the Transcendental Analytic appropriately substitutes ontology. Kant puts it clearly when he remarks that "[…] the proud name of an ontology, which presumes to offer synthetic a priori cognitions of things in general in a systematic doctrine (e.g., the principle of causality), must give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding." (A247/B304)

Consequently, as regards the question of the possibility of cognition, Kant, bringing together the conditions of intuition and concepts as necessary for synthetic cognition, explicitly remarks that:

Knowledge is a judgment from which proceeds a concept that has objective reality, i.e., to which a corresponding object can be given in experience. But all experience consists of the intuition of an object, i.e., an immediate and individual representation, through which the object is given as to knowledge, and of concept, i.e., a mediate representation through a characteristic common to several objects, whereby it is therefore thought. Neither of these two modes of representation constitutes knowledge on its own, and if there are to be synthetic a priori cognitions, there must also be a priori intuitions as well as concepts.[11]

II. Critique of Pure Reason and Transcendental Dialectic

As stated above, the Transcendental Analytic underscored the point that the concepts of the understanding, to yield cognition, must not be used dialectically, that is, independently of the objects of sensibility, otherwise they lead to metaphysical illusions. In other words, Kant, against the dominant Leibniz–Wolffian metaphysical

[11] Kant, [Fort 20: 266; 358-59] as quoted by Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 95.

tradition, argues that transcendent metaphysics is not possible and its claims are sheer illusions. He claims that this type of metaphysics is "mere groping … a groping among mere concepts" (Preface, second edition, BXV). It amounts to pure reason making inferences by trying to prove the reality of metaphysical entities such as the soul, the whole world, and God, through extending patterns of inference which are valid within the limits of human sensibility beyond those limits. Kant undertakes to deconstruct the arguments and claims of knowledge of these realities by pointing out the illusions of speculative reason in claiming to know these ideas independently of experience. These illusions stem from the nature of reason itself. Accordingly, Kant discusses the nature of reason and shows how it inevitably leads to fallacious arguments about these ideas, and then points out that these ideas are not knowable but have practical bearing on morality. This is Kant's twofold objective in the Transcendental Dialectic.

1. Critique of Pure Reason and the Transcendental Illusion

The section that deals with Kant's critique of the three branches of special metaphysics in the Leibniz-Wolffian tradition that lay claims to a priori knowledge concerning the soul (rational psychology), the world (rational cosmology), and God (rational theology), is preceded by a thorough critique of the powers of speculative reason, where Kant specifies the different uses of reasons, namely, the logical and the transcendental or pure functions.

Kant considers these claims as errors resulting from the transcendental use (i.e., beyond the boundaries of experience) of the categories or the principles of the understanding by reason, which he had previously warned against (A 239/B 298; A 297/B 353). Here, Kant establishes a distinction – a distinction which in the Transcendental Analytic is quasi-blurred, if not absent - between

the faculties of understanding and reason.[12] As the supreme faculty of cognition, reason, in addition to being the instance of drawing mediate inferences (logical function), is uniquely the "faculty of principles" that generates concepts (transcendental or pure function), while understanding, in relation to reason understood in the latter sense, is merely the "faculty of rules" (A 299/ B 356). Reason is qualitatively superior to and distinct from the understanding in terms of cognitions. While the understanding is "a faculty of the unity of appearances by means of rules, reason is the faculty of the unity of rules of understanding under principles." Understanding relates to objects of intuition and achieves unity of apperception; reason, on the other hand, relates to the understanding, synthesizing its manifold cognitions through a priori concepts (A 302/ B 359). Whereas the understanding seeks to achieve unification of self-conscious experience or manifold apperceptions through combining intuitions and concepts, following the a priori rules of the categories and forms of intuition, reason synthesizes the manifold judgments of the understanding under universal unconditioned principles, thus unifying cognition.[13]

Contrary to its logical function where, to explain given facts, reason draws inferences until arriving at the universal unconditioned principle for the conditioned cognitions of the understanding (A 307/ B 364), in its transcendental or real function, it presupposes the existence of this unconditioned principle in the given experience (A 307–8/ B 364–5). By the "unconditioned," Kant means an explanation absolutely universal and necessary, needing no further explanation. And the essence of reason is to seek the

[12] For more on the distinction between the faculties of the understanding and reason, see Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* , 309-10.

[13] Michael Rohlf, "The Ideas of Pure Reason," *in The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), 198.

"unconditioned" by means of a series of syllogisms going from experience to the universal principle. However, it is precisely this transcendental function that poses problem for reason because it generates transcendental ideas and illusions.

The transcendental use of the pure concepts or categories of the understanding results in the transcendental illusion which is accounted for in the manner in which reason, naturally and unavoidably as with objects of sensible experience, makes connection or inferences with regard to the soul, the world-whole, and God, as if they were objects of experience. The transcendental illusion precisely consists in mistaking the subjective ideas of reason in relation to these transcendent objects for objective principles; thus, erroneously inferring a priori knowledge about them.

Kant is careful to note the fact that, by its very nature to seek cognition from universal principles unconditioned by spatiotemporal limits (A 300-01/ B 357-58), reason is naturally prone to make transcendental use of the categories, which results in illusory transcendental judgments. He clearly states that "[…] in our reason (considered subjectively as a human faculty of cognition) there lie fundamental rules and maxims for its use, which look entirely like objective principles, and through them it comes about that the subjective necessity of a certain connection of our concepts on behalf of the understanding is taken for an objective necessity, the determination of things in themselves. [This is] an illusion that cannot be avoided at all …" (A 297/B 354).

To make sense of the above, it is important to recall the conclusion Kant arrives at in the Transcendental Analytic, according to which it is the application of the concepts of the understanding to the objects of intuition or sensible experience that yields cognition. However, going by the nature of reason which seeks cognition from

universal principles unconditioned by the limits of experience, it generates ideas about the soul, the world-whole, and God, which are outside the limits of possible experience, and mistakes these subjective ideas for objective entities, resulting to transcendental illusion, that is, the claim that we have a priori knowledge about them.

Thus, Kant's concern with determining the limits of pure reason reaches, in the Transcendental Dialectic, its peak. Specifically, he points out that reason's quest for cognition of things in themselves, under absolutely universal principles or concepts unconditioned by the limits of experience is "something that, if not impossible, is at least very paradoxical" (A 302/ B 359). In the process, reason generates transcendental ideas and illusion. Therefore, it is imperative to uncover the illusion in the transcendental judgments. Although this type of illusion is inevitable, inasmuch as it is never possible to be totally and once-for-all immune from it, uncovering the fallacious arguments underlying it, is, nonetheless, important to not falling into making erroneous judgments about the soul, the world, and God, and claiming to have a priori knowledge about these ideas.[14]

2. The Transcendental Ideas or Pure Concepts of Reason

The Transcendental Ideas, also known as concepts of pure reason, are inferred concepts (A 310/ B 366) of the unconditioned (A 322/ B 379). They are arrived at by applying the forms of the syllogisms to the unconditioned synthetic unity of all conditions in general, by means of the categories.[15] Thus, the three logical forms of

[14] Rohlf, "The Ideas of Pure Reason," 194.

[15] Since reason seeks the "unconditioned," that which needs no further explanation, by explaining given facts through ascending series of syllogisms toward unconditioned principles, a transcendental concept of reason will seek the absolute totality in the synthesis of conditions, until arriving at the absolutely

syllogisms, namely: categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive, are themselves derived from the categories of relation from which three paths are discernible to the unconditioned: first, the unconditioned for the categorical synthesis in a **subject, second** for the **hypothetical** synthesis of the members of a **series,** and **third** for the **disjunctive** synthesis of the parts in a **system**. (A 323/ B 379)

Further, Kant specifies the content of the transcendental ideas corresponding to the forms of the syllogisms. They are specified into three, in relation to:

(i) the subject
(ii) the manifold of the object of appearance
(iii) all things in general (A 333-4/ B 390-1).

From the foregoing, Kant goes on to remark that all transcendental ideas will be categorized into three:

"[the first category of transcendental ideas] contains the absolute (unconditioned) **unity** of the **thinking subject**, the second the absolute **unity** of the series of **conditions of appearance**, the **third** the absolute **unity** of the **condition of all objects of thought** in general. The thinking subject is the object of **psychology**, the sum total of appearances (the world) is the object of **cosmology**, and the thing that contains the supreme condition of the possibility of everything that can be thought (the being of all beings) is the object of **theology**." (A 334/B 391).

In this way, pure reason, through the use of the logical forms of syllogisms or the categories of relation, comes up with the ideas for a transcendental doctrine of the soul (rational psychology), a

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unconditioned, i.e. what is unconditioned in every relation, also known as the unity of reason (A 326/ B 383).

transcendental science of the world (rational cosmology), and a transcendental theory of God (transcendental theology).

Nonetheless, it is important to note here that some scholars have considered arbitrary and spurious not only Kant's derivation of the three Ideas of the unconditioned, namely: unconditioned subject or substance, unconditioned causality, and unconditioned system, from the categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive forms of syllogisms or the categories of relation, but also and more importantly his conflating them with the Ideas of the soul, the world and God respectively.[16] Norman Kemp Smith, for instance, remarks that equating, exclusively and uniquely, the Ideas of unconditioned substance, unconditioned causality to the Ideas of the soul and the World respectively, leaves no room for other possible applications they can have.

Despite this line of thought, it is also expedient to remark that, although Kant's derivation of the transcendental Ideas from the categories of relation and his equating them to the Ideas of the soul, the world and God, seem arbitrary, much of the point underscored by his demonstration of the nature of reason to seek unconditioned principles points to the regulative function of these transcendental Ideas under which empirical cognitions of the understanding can be systematically unified. The regulative function of the Ideas is demonstrated in its immanent use, that is, in relation to experience. To be sure, not that these Ideas are objectifiable, because they lack corresponding objects in experience, nor can their use be transcendent, which will inevitably lead to illusion. Their proper use, therefore, is to serve as regulative principles of unity of the manifold of empirical cognitions.

[16] See Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason* 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 439.

III. Critical Evaluation of Kant's Critique of Metaphysics

This section critically appraises Kant's philosophical project of reforming metaphysics, undertaken in the Critique, by highlighting the merits, interrogations, as well as the problems raised by his critique of metaphysics.

1. The Question of the Nature and Possibility of Metaphysics, the Problem of Skepticism, and the Reform of Metaphysics

To be appropriately construed, Kant's philosophical project in the Critique, as it pertains to metaphysics and knowledge, must be approached from its context of emergence. As stated above, Kant sets out in the Critique to determine not only the nature and possibility of metaphysics, but also to refute skepticism. On the one hand, Kant deconstructs the Leibniz-Wolffian metaphysical tradition solely based on analytic truths, through his treatment of how the synthetic a priori judgments are possible.[17] On the other hand, he had to counter skepticism by attempting to reconcile the debate between the rationalists and empiricists, which revolved around the source of all knowledge and belief, whether reason or sense experience constituted the basis of knowledge and beliefs about the empirical world.[18]

Within this context, Kant pursued a twofold objective: first, preserving the rational (and metaphysical) foundation of knowledge which constitutes the basis of science, or what he called "metaphysics in its first part" (B xviii – xix); second, dispensing with "a completely isolated speculative science of reason, which

[17] Anderson, "The Introduction to the *Critique*," 75.

[18] Pertaining to the rationalist-empiricist debate, see Frederick J. Copleston, S .J. *History of Philosophy*: *Modern Philosophy from the French Enlightenment to Kant*, *Volume VI* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 212 -13.

soars far above the teachings of experience" (B xiv) at least as it pertains to knowledge about the empirical world, and relegating it to the sphere of moral practice. In other words, to reposition metaphysics on "the secure path of a science" (B xix), it needed to be reformed. Hence, alongside the analytic metaphysics of the Leibniz-Wolffian tradition which Kant found problematic, he also contended that metaphysics, in its attempt, throughout history, to account for the necessary and underlying framework for sensible experience and the nature of things in themselves, by positing the claims of the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the freedom of the will, has failed to distinguish the sphere of what is knowable from that of the unknowable. The inability to adequately account for these claims has left metaphysics in a dire state of reform, and has heightened general skepticism about knowledge, which, taken altogether, necessarily has ensuing consequences not only for science, but also for religion and morality, because the failure of reason in metaphysics inevitably delegitimizes its claims to knowledge in other spheres of human activity, especially the sciences.

From the foregoing, Kant's criticism of metaphysics can better be understood not as total abolition or entirely dispensing with metaphysical beliefs. However, that metaphysical claims remain meaningful statements especially as regards moral experience and the grounding for the phenomenal world does not invariably mean that they can be known. W. H. Walsh, commenting on the Copernican Revolution introduced by Kant in metaphysics, argues that it consists in a "methodological change" articulated through demonstrating the total unknowability of metaphysical statements (especially in relation to the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the freedom of the will) and establishing them as basis

for practical reason and morality.[19] As Kant himself puts it, there is a denial of knowledge in metaphysics so as to make room for faith. (B xxx)

More importantly, Kant's treatment of the phenomena and noumena, as well as his positing of metaphysical questions of the existence of God and the freedom of the will as grounding practical reason attempt the resolution of skepticism.[20] To be sure, the "critique" of both theoretical and practical reason is meant to show that the faculties of human intellect, namely: sensibility, judgment, understanding, and reason, can attain certain universal, necessary a priori truths independent of experience, albeit these truths must have corresponding forms in sensibility. And to the extent that knowledge of things beyond experience or sensibility cannot be posited, it is, nevertheless, reasonable to hold them as necessary and sufficient for morality, and to account for them through faith.[21]

2. The Question of the Ambiguity of Kant' Use of the Term "Metaphysics"

The use of the term "metaphysics" in contrasting ways in both editions of the Critique raises questions with regard to the aspect or aspects of metaphysics Kant is precisely concerned with or wants to address.[22] In the first edition, we have, on the one hand, metaphysics as "the battlefield of endless controversies," (A viii) since it deals with the intractable questions that reason cannot satisfactorily give answers to. On the other hand, metaphysics is

[19] W. H. Walsh, *Kant's Criticism of Metaphysics* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 2-3.
[20] See Paul Guyer, *Kant* (London/New York: Routledge, 2006), 10 -13.
[21] Guyer, *Kant, 13.*
[22] Karl Ameriks, "The Critique of metaphysics: The structure and fate of Kant's dialectic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), 270.

employed to connote "the only one of the all the sciences that may promise that little but unified effort [namely, the effort of Transcendental philosophy] … will complete it." (A xx) Analogously, the Preface of the second edition separates the Transcendental Analytic, which Kant considers as metaphysics in the positive sense, from the Transcendental Dialectic, tagged as metaphysics in the negative sense.

Consequently, interpreters and commentators have tended to focus on either of the two aspects of metaphysics, lamenting either his attack on traditional metaphysics or lauding and endorsing his metaphysics of experience. As such, the variety of interpretations on Kant's critique of metaphysics is as a result of "complications concerning central notions such as the determination of the "conditions of experience""[23] which convey an inherent ambiguity with regard to what exactly is meant by Kant's claim that metaphysics is concerned with that which reason claims "independently of experience." (A xii) The term "independent" conveys both positive and negative meanings. Its positive sense underscores "a justificatory independence" from any specific path of experience, rather than total independence from experience, (B 2) while in the negative sense, any transcendental use of reason must be guarded against, (A xii) in which case the metaphysician makes use of concepts whose objects are not given in experience. Here, Kant specifically alludes to the Ideas of Reason – God, freedom, immortality -, the domain of traditional metaphysics. He excludes these Ideas from the domain of his metaphysics of experience on the basis that they go beyond the limits of experience, have no corresponding objects in experience, (A3/ B6), and do not tell us anything about the structuring and determination of spatiotemporal objects. Thus, he raises the question of the legitimacy and

[23] Ameriks, "The Critique of metaphysics," 271.

justification of metaphysical notions whose meaning seems independent of spatiotemporal determination and characterization of objects of experience. His choice and use of metaphysical concepts such as substance, causality, space, time, and infinity, as warranted and legitimate rests on the fact that they make our experience of objects possible, by determining the spatiotemporal limits within which objective experience can be intuited and cognized, which the Ideas of reason – God, freedom, immortality - do not.

Yet, that these Ideas do not directly apply to objective experience does not mean that they lack warrant or legitimacy. As Karl Ameriks rightly remarks, "[…] because most metaphysical terms have a meaning that seems independent of any ordinary spatiotemporal characterization of objects, one would not at first expect them to have to be justified in terms of some kind of transcendental role in structuring spatiotemporal determinations."[24] The motive of determining and grounding spatiotemporal objects which makes Kant to reject metaphysical claims about the Ideas of Reason (God, freedom, immortality) from the domain of theoretical philosophy falls short of a systematic and comprehensive examination of all the Ideas of Reason that are central to metaphysics.

A more sympathetic and slightly different view from Amerik's about Kant's use of the term metaphysics and his critique of it is offered by Frederick Copleston who remarks that, though Kant's use of the term "metaphysics" has different meanings in the Critique, the particular sense in which the term is employed is specified by the passage of reference. On the other hand, his critique of metaphysics, because it is chiefly targeted at a particular

[24] Ameriks, "The Critique of metaphysics," 273.

type of metaphysics, namely, the Leibniz-Wolffian system, is rather limited in its scope: not adequately considering other metaphysical ideas in other systems.[25] However, he points out that the resolutions Kant arrives at, especially with regard to his treatment of the concepts of cause and substance, are equally and invariably valid for all metaphysical systems in their application.

Further, Copleston notes that the metaphysical claims Kant rejects are the illusory knowledge considered by dogmatic philosophers as attainable by pure reason. However, metaphysics as a natural disposition, which underscores the mind's quest or tendency to probe into questions about God, the immortality of the soul, is not only possible but also actual.

3. The Problem of the Relation of Pure Concepts to Objects

The Transcendental Deduction poses the problem of the relation of pure concepts of the understanding to objects of experience, or how the former determines the latter; it raises the question of the objective validity of these pure concepts, as purported by Kant, and the extent to which they can be used. All that Kant offered as solution to the problem of this relation is that just as objects of experience must conform to the a priori forms of sensibility: space and time to be intuitable, (A 90/ B 123) so they must conform to the a priori concepts in order to be cognizable (A 93/ B 125-6). Walsh, however, points out the ambiguity of the word "object" in the two cases: in the first case, object of intuition is a function of personal experience, whereas object of experience is subject to consensual verification and validation.[26]

Other commentators (e.g. Paul Guyer) have questioned what is actually meant by the objective validity of the a priori concepts or

[25] Copleston, S.*J., History of Philosophy*, 215.
[26] Walsh, *Criticism of Metaphysics*, 46.

categories of the understanding, which the Transcendental Deductions aims to prove, and how well Kant arrives at proving that. In other words, the question is asked whether the Transcendental Deduction is not redundant, merely repeating what had already been proved in the Metaphysical Deduction.[27] In particular, Guyer calls into question the arguments Kant invokes to argue for the objective validity of the categories as universally and necessarily applying to all experiences. Specifically, Kant offers the "threefold synthesis" argument in the first edition version of the Deduction, which highlights the three elements in every experiential cognition of objects: first, the synthesis of apprehension of several intuitions of an object or a manifold of intuition which constitutes the basis of the possibility of cognition, both empirical and a priori (A 100); second, the synthesis of reproduction or imagination through which earlier representations or appearances are reproduced and distinguished from subsequent ones (A 101-02); third, the synthesis of recognition which allows the manifold of representations intuited and reproduced to be brought under a concept (A 104).

Kant goes further to illustrate the threefold synthesis using the concept of a dog. No doubt, the concept of a dog allows for the recognition of several representations of a four-legged shape, a barking sound, a doggy smell, as the representation of a dog, and thus distinguishes it from other quadrupeds with nearly similar properties. The argument, however, demonstrates the indispensability of empirical concepts in the cognition of objects, without which the objective validity of a priori concepts of the understanding remains question-begging.[28] In other words, empirical concepts supplement a priori concepts or categories of

[27] Guyer, *Kant*, 84.
[28] Guyer, *Kant,* 84.

the understanding in the cognition of objects. Without their dependence on the categories, representing how the latter relate to objects in order to yield cognition does not tell us much about their objective validity.

Moreover, Guyer remarks that from the claim that a priori concepts lie at the ground of all experiential cognition as a priori conditions (A 93-4/ B 126), we cannot deduce that "all our experiences must also be experiences of objects…"[29] and, thus, calls into question the objective validity of the categories as universally and necessarily applying to all our experiences. More to it, he notes the contrast between Kant's treatment of the categories of the understanding in the Transcendental Deduction as the a priori conditions for the transcendental synthesis and his conception of the same in the Metaphysical Deduction as the pure forms of empirical concepts.[30] The ambiguity appears to be that, as pure concepts of the understanding, the categories must have some content or ontological import independently of sensible experience, and as logical forms of judgment, they are necessarily without content or meaning until they are schematized.

Conclusion

It is clear that Kant's metaphysics of experience as articulated principally in the Critique undoubtedly revolutionized metaphysics, by establishing the a priori structures that make objective experience possible. It is also evident from the analyses undertaken that the solution to the central question of Critique, namely: how the synthetic a priori judgments are possible, gives precedence and autonomy to the knowing subject, through whose faculty the unity of apperception is ultimately possible (what has been considered as

[29] Guyer, *Kant*, 84.
[30] Guyer, *Kant,* 88.

Kant's Copernican Revolution). However, Kant's doctrine of the categories as the conditions for the possibility of all experience remains fairly ambiguous as regards their ontological import or not, leaving his metaphysics of experience even more problematic than it appears. Moreover, his separation of Transcendental Analytic or the positive doctrine of metaphysics, from Transcendental Dialectic which, because it is based on a nonexperiential use of reason, is a negative metaphysics, ultimately drives an unwarranted wedge between theoretical reason and practical reason, raising the question whether the scope of metaphysical inquiry can be limited to the sole motive of accounting for the spatiotemporal structures or determinations of objective experience. And, as Ameriks rightly remarks, "[…] if Kant's philosophy is to have any chance of "complete" and "scientific" success in curbing metaphysics in a bad sense, the Critique needs at the very least to offer a systematic examination of all the Ideas of Reason allegedly central to metaphysics."[31]

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[31] "The Critique of metaphysics," 273.

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