

Kant's Empiricist Rationalism in the Mid-1760s

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Abstract

This article examines Kant's conception of the nature and importance of philosophy in his writings from the mid-1760s: *Inquiry concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality* (the so-called Prize Essay, published in 1764), the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (also published in 1764), the unpublished notes written in the latter or the *Remarks in the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (written circa 1764-1765), the *Essay on the Maladies of the Head* (published in 1764), and the *Announcement of the Organization of His Lectures in the Winter Semester 1765-66* (published in 1765). The paper concludes that these texts offer a consistent view of philosophy, a fact that is striking given the diversity of the texts with respect to tone, genre, and audience. Under the influence of Crusius, Kant questioned the methods and conclusions of Wolffian school metaphysics, although he employed many of its concepts and based his lectures on school philosophy textbooks. He criticized contemporary German philosophy and thereby attempted to reform it. In the *Observations*, *Remarks*, *Maladies*, and *Announcement*, Kant offered an empirical formulation of his 1762/3 system and applied the analytic method of the *Inquiry*, starting with what was given in experience and easiest to examine. Kant undertook the project of synthesizing various empirical phenomena within a broadly rationalist framework, and he believed that this philosophical project had important practical consequences.

How did Kant think of the nature, method, and relevance of philosophy in the mid-1760s? To address this question, this paper analyzes Kant's notion of philosophy in four texts that were written or published in 1764 or 1765 and in a set of unpublished notes, the *Remarks*, which were

written during the same period.¹ This article focuses on the *Inquiry, Observations, Remarks, Maladies, and Announcement* with one principal theme in mind: Kant's conception of philosophy.²

¹ References to Kant cite the volume and page number of the *Akademie Ausgabe* (=AA). See Immanuel Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1900-). References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*=KrV) instead cite the standard A and B pagination of the first and second editions of 1781 and 1787 (respectively, AA 4: 1-252 and AA 3: 1-552). For quotations of Kant, the reference to the English translation's page number is given first, followed by the reference to the AA pagination. Since translations of the *Remarks* (*Bemerkungen*) are my own, only the reference to the AA page number is given.

² Johann Gottfried Herder's notes on Kant's lectures on metaphysics and on practical philosophy (1762-1764) could have been considered as potential sources of Kant's views of philosophy during this period. However, not only were the sometimes enigmatic notes not penned by Kant, he also rarely states his conception of philosophy there. For the Herder notes on Kant's lectures on metaphysics, see Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, trans. and ed. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xxix-xxx and 3-16, and AA 28: 39-53. For the Herder notes on Kant's lectures on practical philosophy, see Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, ed. Peter Heath and Jerome Schneewind, trans. Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xiii-xv and 1-36, and AA 27: 3-78.

Mostly due to limited space, but also because they were written and published before 1764, the following three texts will not be closely examined, even if they belong to Kant's 1762/3 system: *The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures Demonstrated by M. Immanuel Kant* (*Die falsche Spitzfindigkeit der vier syllogistischen Figuren erwiesen von M. Immanuel Kant*), probably completed by early autumn 1762 and published in 1762; *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (*Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseyns Gottes*), probably completed by early autumn 1762 and published by mid-December 1762, even though the original title-page gave the date of 1763; and *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy* (*Versuch den Begriff der negativen Größen in die Weltweisheit einzuführen*), completed by mid-June 1763 and probably published late in 1763. For complete translations, see Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, trans. and ed. David Walford and Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Specifically, for *False Subtlety*, see Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 85-105; *Falsche Spitzfindigkeit*, in AA 2: 45-61. For *Only Possible Argument*, see Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 107-201; *Beweisgrund*, in AA 2: 63-163. For *Negative Magnitudes*, see

Why should we study these early, pre-Critical writings? This examination seems to be worth undertaking for at least three reasons: 1) to make up for the relatively little attention these texts have received in the literature, when considered together and with attention to Kant's conception of philosophy; 2) to decipher the origins of the Critical conception of philosophy (KrV A837 / B865), enabling us to compare the pre-Critical and Critical Kant; and 3) to depict the interesting views of philosophy that Kant held during this time—after all, the Kant of this period is an intriguing writer and thinker. By looking at these texts, we are in a position to see to what extent Kant remained true to the conception of philosophy he held in the mid-1760s. I hope the consideration of these writings will allow us to attain a more historically accurate and philosophically sophisticated understanding of Kant's development.

What, in short, did Kant think of the nature of philosophy? What was its method? Why did philosophy matter? The proposed interpretation is as follows. For Kant during this period, philosophy comprised not only metaphysics, which encompassed both empirical and rational psychology, but also logic, aesthetics, and practical philosophy (ethics), the last of which Kant sometimes conceived as a subset of metaphysics.³ Kant, under the influence of Christian

Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 203-241; *Negativen Größen*, in AA 2: 165-204. On the dates of composition and publication, see the editors' introductions in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, xxxv-lxxiv.

Kant's review, *Recension von Silberschlags Schrift: Theorie der am 23. Juli 1762 erschienenen Feuerkugel*, published in *Königsbergsche Gelehrte und Politische Zeitungen* in 1764, contains little philosophical content and is not discussed here. See Kant, *Rezension von Silberschlags Schrift*, in AA 2: 272a-272d and also in 8: 447-50. The same holds for Kant's brief memorial piece for Funk, *Gedanken bei dem frühzeitigen Ableben des Herrn Johann Friedrich von Funk, in einem Sendschreiben an seine Mutter* (1760), in AA 2: 39-44.

³ See Giorgio Tonelli, "Kant's Ethics as a Part of Metaphysics: A Possible Newtonian Suggestion? With Some Comments on Kant's *Dreams of a Seer*," in *Philosophy and the Civilizing Arts. Essays Presented to Herbert W. Schneider*, ed. Craig Walton and John P. Anton (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1975), 236-63.

August Crusius, a Thomasian, questioned the methods and conclusions of Wolffian school metaphysics. At the same time, Kant employed many of school philosophy's concepts and during this period continued to teach the Wolffian texts of Alexander Baumgarten and the latter's student, Georg Friedrich Meier, so it would be incorrect to claim that he abandoned school metaphysics altogether.⁴ Kant attempted to reform metaphysics during these years by proposing a new method for it, distinguishing the method of metaphysics from that of mathematics. He tried to demarcate the limits of its claims and gave metaphysics a moral and practical orientation. In short, he did not give up on metaphysics, and it would be misleading to claim that in the 1760s Kant was opposed to any form of metaphysics.⁵

As in Wolffian philosophy, in the Kantian philosophy of the mid-1760s, unlike in the Critical work, metaphysics is connected with, rather than opposed to, the notion of empirical foundations of knowledge. Kant thought that philosophy should be grounded in empirical propositions. In the *Inquiry*, for instance, Kant claimed that philosophy should start with what is given in experience and avoid fabricating unnecessary, nominal definitions.⁶ Kant argued

⁴ My interpretation thus agrees with that of Bruna Fazio-Allmayer, who holds that between 1764 and 1766 Kant distanced himself from "abstract metaphysics" (presumably Wolffianism) since he retained a "naturalistic innatism" (*innatismo naturalistico*) that came from the British moralists and Rousseau. She maintains that Crusius, Pietism, and the ethical rationalism of Rousseau influenced Kant at this time. Kant endorsed the concept of the dignity of the human person that was prevalent in early modern thought. All of this would lead him to develop a new metaphysics of morals, founded on the notion of freedom. See Bruna Fazio-Allmayer, *L'uomo nella storia in Kant* (Bologna: Capelli, 1968), 47-48.

⁵ For a similar interpretation to mine, see Aldo Bonetti, *Studi sulla formazione della concezione kantiana della libertà* (Milano: ISU, Università cattolica, 1984), 47.

⁶ Translations of the *Inquiry* are taken from Kant, *Inquiry concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality*, in *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 243-86, a translation of idem, *Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und der Moral*, in AA 2: 273-301. Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 248-50; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 276-78.

in the *Inquiry* that metaphysical claims can and should be based on experience. In the *Observations*, Kant made empirical claims about human beings and engaged in what he would later call pragmatic anthropology. Moreover, the *Maladies* discussed religious mania and sensory hallucinations from a primarily empirical standpoint.⁷ Kant's lectures on metaphysics also reveal this empiricist bent. The lectures were based on Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* and thus covered empirical psychology, which Kant refers to as the "metaphysical science of man based on experience." They also included empirical zoology, "the consideration of animals" and all the living phenomena (*alles Leben*) that present themselves to the senses.⁸

Kant also thought that philosophy should be practical and useful for life.⁹ In a well-known letter to Moses Mendelssohn of 8 April 1766, shortly after the period examined here, Kant claimed that he had become convinced that "the true and lasting welfare of the human race depends on metaphysics."¹⁰

⁷ See the preface in idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, xv.

⁸ Translations of the *Announcement* are taken from Kant, *Announcement of the Organization of His Lectures in the Winter Semester 1765-66*, in *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 287-300, a translation of *Nachricht von der Einrichtung seiner Vorlesungen in dem Winterhalbjahre von 1765-1766*, in AA 2: 303-13. Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 295; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 309.

⁹ For a similar interpretation, see John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and "Kant in the 1760s: Contextualizing the 'Popular' Turn," in *Kant's Legacy: Essays in Honor of Lewis White Beck*, ed. Piedrag Cicovacki (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2001), 387ff. Although I am indebted to Zammito's work and follow him on many points, I put less emphasis on (though do not deny) Kant's affinity with Popular philosophy and thus characterize Kant as closer to traditional German metaphysics, which Kant was still teaching at this time. In my view, Kant offered a reform of traditional German metaphysics *precisely because* of his closeness to it. Kant's affinities with Lambert (discussed below) seem to strengthen this reading.

¹⁰ Kant, *Correspondence*, trans. and ed. Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). All translations of correspondence to and from Kant are taken from this volume, which is an expanded version of Zweig's *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence, 1755-99*

This claim seems to mark a change of heart. If so, how did Kant conceive of philosophy *before* 1762, that is, prior to defending the claims of the so-called 1762/3 system? Answering this question, even if briefly, will allow us to appreciate what is new in the mid-1760s and help us understand the significance of Kant's views in the period examined. Although it is unnecessary to give a detailed analysis of each of the works from the 1740s and 1750s, a few words can be said about these writings.

Early in his academic career, Kant wrote scientific works on empirical physics, astronomy, cosmology, physical geography, geology, and meteorology. He completed two contributions to physics. *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces*¹¹ (1747), his first published work and his first book, attempted to reconcile Cartesian kinematics with Leibnizian dynamics. Kant's *Concise Outline of Some Reflections on Fire*¹² (1755), written in Latin, counted as his Master's thesis but was published only posthumously. Kant also published two short essays on physical geography of 1754 and an important work of Newtonian cosmology, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755).¹³ The latter, Kant's second book, contained the famous nebular hypothesis about the formation of planets and stars. In 1755, a devastating earthquake struck Lisbon, killing over 40,000 inhabitants. In response, in 1756 Kant published three brief essays on earthquakes; although the tracts were mostly scientific, Kant also touched on and

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). Kant, *Correspondence*, 90; in AA 10: 70.

¹¹ Kant, *Gedanken von der wahren Schätzung der lebendigen Kräfte und Beurtheilung der Beweise derer sich Herr von Leibnitz und andere Mechaniker in dieser Streitsache bedienen haben, nebst einigen vorhergehenden Betrachtungen welche die Kraft der Körper überhaupt betreffen*, in AA 1: 1-181.

¹² Idem, *Meditationum quarundam de igne succincta delineatio*, in AA 1: 369-84.

¹³ Idem, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels, oder Versuch von der Verfassung und dem mechanischen Ursprunge des ganzen Weltgebäudes nach Newtonischen Grundsätzen abgehandelt*, in AA 1: 215-368.

defended optimism. He published two short meteorological essays in 1756 and 1757. The last of Kant's scientific writings from this period was *New Theory of Motion and Rest* (1758).¹⁴

Kant's works in theoretical philosophy at this time included his doctoral dissertation *A New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition* (1755),¹⁵ the *Physical Monadology* (i.e., *The Employment in Natural Philosophy of Metaphysics Combined with Geometry, of Which Sample 1 Contains the Physical Monadology*) (1756),¹⁶ and *Attempt at Some Reflections on Optimism* (1759).¹⁷ Let us briefly consider each of these works.

Kant's second Latin dissertation, *New Elucidation*, criticized Leibniz and Wolff, and it displayed the strong influence of Crusius.¹⁸ It rejected the claim that the ultimate principle of all truth is the Law of Contradiction. It argued that affirmative and negative truths require separate principles (What is, is, and What is not, is not), which together make up the Principle of Identity. Kant maintained that the latter takes priority over the Principle of Contradiction. Kant also offered a definition of the Principle of Sufficient (or, following Crusius, Determining) Reason. He argued that all beings that exist contingently

¹⁴ Idem, *M. Immanuel Kants Neuer Lehrbegriff der Bewegung und Ruhe, und der damit verknüpften Folgerungen in den ersten Gründen der Naturwissenschaft, wodurch zugleich seine Vorlesungen in diesem halben Jahre angekündigt werden*, in AA 2: 13-25.

¹⁵ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 1-45; *Principiorum primorum cognitionis metaphysicae nova dilucidatio*, in AA 1: 385-416.

¹⁶ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 47-66; *Metaphysicae cum geometria junctae usus in philosophia naturali, cuius specimen I. continet monadologiam physicam*, in AA 1: 473-87.

¹⁷ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 67-76; *Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus von M. Immanuel Kant, wodurch er zugleich seine Vorlesungen auf das bevorstehende halbe Jahr ankündigt*, in AA 2: 27-35.

¹⁸ See the general introduction in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, xxxvi. *New Elucidation* was written in Latin to satisfy the requirements for academic theses at the time. It earned Kant the title of *Magister legens* and gave him the right to teach (*venia legendi*) at Albertina University.

must have an antecedently determining ground of existence. In response to Crusius' objection that this thesis implied fatalism, Kant gave a compatibilist defense of freedom. Moreover, he attacked the Leibnizian principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles. Finally, he offered proofs of God, arguing, first, from the very *possibility* of a divine being and of all other things, and, second, from the notion that there is a dynamic and reciprocal relation of substances to each other. He thought this relation did not arise from the mere existence of substances alone, but was possible only through a common principle of their being, the divine intellect, who thinks them in a systematic and dynamic schema. In light of all this, de Vleeschauwer seems right to state that the *New Elucidation* appears to us as "rationalist," even if Kant criticized Wolffianism and seemed to be generally aware of rationalism's "defects."¹⁹

Physical Monadology, Kant's third Latin dissertation, written with the intention of supporting his candidacy for a university chair, dealt with a scientific theme, atomic theory. Nevertheless, it also handled important philosophical themes such as the distinction between physical and geometrical space. Kant argued for the compatibility of the infinite divisibility of space, which he believed was required by geometry, and the simplicity, or indivisibility, of physical monads in space. He held that space itself is not a substance, but an appearance of the external relation of substances. He thus defended a view of space that was close, even if not identical, to Leibniz's relativist theory that space is a function of the interaction of monads.

It is interesting for our purposes to note that Kant contended that the ultimate units of reality were beyond the measure of the sensible, or smaller than the empirical threshold. He thought the quest for the basic units of reality led from empirical, sense-based inquiry to conceptual

¹⁹ Herman de Vleeschauwer, *The Development of Kantian Thought*, trans. A. R. C. Duncan (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), 24 and 26, respectively.

and rational contemplation.²⁰ Accordingly, although experience's support was necessary for philosophy, it was not sufficient. Kant believed that the "support of experience" and the "mediation of geometry" were both useful and beneficial for philosophy.²¹ But the assistance went in the other direction as well: metaphysics could also come to the aid of physics. Indeed, Kant claimed that metaphysics illuminated physics and even that metaphysics was its "only support."²² In the early and mid-1760s, Kant would retain the view that the support of experience was necessary and useful for metaphysics. However, the view of the role of mathematics in general and geometry in particular would change. Kant would hold in the 1760s that, with the exception of the notion of negative magnitudes,²³ the concepts and propositions that came from mathematics and geometry had little to no role to play in theoretical philosophy, since the methods of philosophy and mathematics were distinct.

Finally, against opponents of optimism such as Crusius, Kant's *Optimism* defended Leibniz's thesis that God, in creating this world, chose the best, most perfect, and most real of all possible worlds. Kant argued that the very notion of divine choice involves the notion of choosing the best and most perfect: "if God chooses, he chooses only what is

²⁰ See Martin Schönfeld, "Kant's Philosophical Development," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/kant-development/>>.

²¹ Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 51; *Physical Monadology*, in AA 1: 475. Cf. idem, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte*, in AA 1: 243-46. According to Herman de Vleeschauwer, the *Monadology* claimed that the role of metaphysics begins when the experimental and mathematical methods have exhausted their usefulness. Vleeschauwer, *Development*, 21. This characterization, however, makes the separation between physics and metaphysics in the *Monadology* seem stronger than it was, as even the work's title reveals.

²² Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 51; *Physical Monadology*, in AA 1: 475.

²³ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 256; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 283; and idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 207; *Negativen Größen*, in AA 2: 167.

best.”²⁴ At the end of the brief work, Kant announced the topics of his upcoming lectures, as he did in *West Winds* (1757)²⁵ and would do in *Announcement* a few years later. In fact, he announced his lectures in this way seven times throughout his academic career,²⁶ and *Announcement* is the most comprehensive of the descriptions. In *Optimism*, Kant states that he will lecture on logic based on the work of Meier, on metaphysics and ethics following Baumgarten, on physical geography using his own course notes, and on pure mathematics and on mechanics using the work of Christian Wolff.²⁷ In light of our theme, Kant’s conception of philosophy, it is interesting to note that Kant defends common sense. “Philosophy is put to a poor use if it is employed in overturning the principles of sound reason, and it is little honored if it is found necessary to mobilize her forces in order to refute such attempts.”²⁸ Kant would develop his defense of common sense in the *Remarks, Maladies*, and *Announcement*, as we shall see.

The topics that Kant addressed in his very early period, as well as the claims he defended, thus diverged from those of the mid-1760s. Most of Kant’s works from the 1740s and 1750s are either scientific, addressing issues in disciplines such as physics or cosmology, or can be characterized as natural or theoretical philosophy that, while sometimes critical of Leibnizian and Wolffian rationalism,

²⁴. Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 71; *Optimismus*, in AA 2: 29. For a discussion of *Optimism*, see the editors’ comments in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, lxxv-lxxvi.

²⁵. Idem, *Entwurf und Ankündigung eines Collegii der physischen Geographie nebst dem Anhang einer kurzen Betrachtung über die Frage: Ob die Westwinde in unsern Gegenden darum feucht seien, weil sie über ein großes Meer streichen*, in AA 2: 1-12.

²⁶. See introduction in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, lxv.

²⁷. Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 76; *Optimismus*, in AA 2: 35. On the texts Kant used for these lectures, see his *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 425. He used Georg F. Meier’s *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre* (1752) and Alexander Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica* (1739). As we shall see, Kant referred to these two texts in the *Announcement* and used them for his 1765-1766 lectures. For their bibliographic information, see nn. 149 and 70, respectively.

²⁸. Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 75; *Optimismus*, in AA 2: 33.

was still in the rationalist tradition and displayed a rationalist bent. Kant's theoretical writings of the early 1760s were more removed from Leibnizian and Wolffian philosophy. *The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures* (1762) contributed to a debate about the utility of Aristotelian logic, accepted by the Leibnizian tradition. *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1763), Kant's third book, offered a priori and a posteriori proofs of God's existence that were distinct from the ontological proof rehabilitated by Descartes and Leibniz's argument from the contingency of the world. Kant noted in its preface that the existence of God could be known through natural common sense and the employment of sound reason, even without "deep metaphysical investigations" and the "sophistry [*Spitzfindigkeit*] of subtle inferences."²⁹ *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy* (1763) distinguished logical opposition (contradiction) from real opposition (conflict of forces), and the logical grounds of knowing from the real grounds of existence. In these works, Kant distanced himself further from school metaphysics. For instance, in criticizing the validity of the Aristotelian theory of the syllogism, *False Subtlety* indirectly attacked Leibniz, who was uncritical of Aristotelian logic,³⁰ and targeted the Wolffian conception of logic.³¹ As mentioned, Kant defended a philosophy that was empirically grounded. As the *Inquiry* reveals, Kant thought that philosophy needed to look to experience for its data. He criticized the Wolffian attempt to import the mathematical method into philosophy. Kant, like many of his contemporaries such as Nicolas de Béguelin and Johann Heinrich Lambert,³² insisted that the

²⁹ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, 111; *Beweisgrund*, in AA 2: 65. The use of *Spitzfindigkeit* brings to mind Kant's contemporaneous work, *Die falsche Spitzfindigkeit*.

³⁰ See introduction, in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, lviii.

³¹ Giorgio Tonelli, "Conditions in Königsberg and the Making of Kant's Philosophy," in *Bewusst sein, Gerhard Funke zu eigen*, ed. Alexius J. Bucher, Hermann Drüe, Thomas M. Seebohm (Bonn: Bouvier, 1975), 126-44, on 140.

³² See Herman de Vleeschauwer, *Development*, 35.

methods of mathematics and philosophy were distinct. He held that the synthetic method was appropriate for mathematics and the analytic for philosophy.

Kant's works of the 1740s and 1750s contained little moral philosophy: his philosophy had more of a theoretical than practical orientation. Although Kant offered a compatibilist interpretation of human freedom in the *New Elucidation*³³ and discussed humanity as part of the natural, cosmic cycle in *Universal Natural History*,³⁴ he rarely analyzed the human condition for its own sake or turned his attention to moral problems. After reading British empiricists such as Hume³⁵ and especially after engaging with Rousseau,³⁶ however, Kant discovered a new interest in human nature. Rousseau led Kant to reconsider the aims of the arts and sciences in general and of philosophy in particular. After working through Rousseau's writings, especially *Émile*, Kant thought that philosophy should have practical and moral implications: knowledge for its own sake was not sufficient to justify intellectual pursuits.

Kant, who had worked as a private tutor for well-off families between 1747 and 1754, was in the writings of the 1760s more interested in the problem of how to educate human beings and help the young grow into civilized and moral adults. As we shall see, this interest is evident in the concluding passage of the *Observations* and throughout the entire *Announcement*. As the *Maladies, Announcement, Remarks*, and *Observations* likewise reveal, Kant was very intrigued by Rousseau's notion of the difference between natural and civilized human beings. Kant before 1764 mostly examined the workings of nature and concepts in

³³ Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, 22-24; *Nova dilucidatio*, in AA 1: 400-401.

³⁴ Idem, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte*, in AA 1: 318, 353.

³⁵ Johann Georg Hamann mentioned Hume twice in a letter to Kant of 27 July 1759; see Kant, *Correspondence*, 52, 53; in AA 10: 15. It seems inaccurate to claim, with de Vleeschauwer, that prior to Kant's Critical period Hume's writings, even if Kant was aware of them, did not exercise any perceptible influence on him; de Vleeschauwer, *Development*, 28.

³⁶ Hamann mentioned Rousseau in a letter to Kant written in late December 1759; see Kant, *Correspondence*, 65; in AA 10: 30.

theoretical metaphysics; after 1764 he began to address the essence and ends of *human nature*.

In the mid-1760s Kant held that some metaphysical claims could be grounded on the characteristics of the human being, on human nature. He expressed doubts about the Leibnizian conception of space, which Kant had come close to defending in the *Physical Monadology*. In the *Inquiry*, Kant emphasized the indefinability of certain fundamental spatial relations. He moved toward the view that the human *body* played a role in the perception of spatial relations and the directionality of space, of right and left, above and below, behind and before.³⁷ This idea would be elaborated in his criticisms of the Leibnizian theory of space in *Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Directions in Space* (1768),³⁸ whose arguments Kant would further modify and extend in the *Inaugural Dissertation* or *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World* (1770)³⁹ and the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). This departure from the Leibnizian understanding of space culminated in the idea, not yet proposed in the *Inquiry*, that space is a subjective form of human sensibility. (Kant would make parallel but distinct arguments with regard to the nature of time.)

In short, then, in the pre-Critical writings of the mid-1760s,⁴⁰ Kant undertook the project of synthesizing various

³⁷ On Kant's developing views of sensibility and the role of the body, see Angelica Nuzzo, *Ideal Embodiment: Kant's Theory of Sensibility* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), and review by Robert R. Clewis, in *Review of Metaphysics* 63 (2010): 715-17. For Kant's early position, see Nuzzo, *Embodiment*, 21-44.

³⁸ Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, 361-72; *Von dem ersten Grunde des Unterschiedes der Gegenden im Raume*, in AA 2: 375-83.

³⁹ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, 373-416; *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis*, in AA 2: 385-419.

⁴⁰ Kuno Fischer broke down Kant's pre-Critical period into three phases. According to Fischer, in the first phase Kant was under the influence of Wolffian metaphysics and Newton's natural philosophy. In the second, he was influenced by the British empiricism, in particular Locke, and the moral sense philosophy of Shaftesbury. In the third phase, Kant followed Hume's experience-based scepticism and Rousseau's ideal naturalism. According to Fischer, Kant had not yet proposed any *new*

empirical⁴¹ phenomena within a broadly rationalist framework, and he thought that this project had very important practical consequences for human beings.

Kant maintained views that carried over in some form into the Critical philosophy, including, but not limited to, the following claims: synthesis is required for the

philosophical positions, even if he expressed his views in original ways. Kuno Fischer, *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie*, vol. 4 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1909), 148.

Although Fischer's division is useful, I question some of his claims. I agree that Kant's positions were expressed in original ways. I would add that much, even if not all, of the actual content of Kant's views, as well as his synthesis of rationalism and empiricism, not to mention his diverse styles of writing, were unique. (Giorgio Tonelli likewise concluded that Kant's early philosophical position was that of an [anti-Wolffian] *eclectic*, not that of an independent thinker, since Kant's position supposedly lacked genuine originality, which could only be claimed for a few elements of his philosophy. Tonelli, "Conditions in Königsberg," 139. For similar reasons, this view seems somewhat misleading.) Moreover, I would also clarify that Hutcheson, not just Shaftesbury, influenced Kant in what Fischer calls stage two. Kant mentions Hutcheson explicitly in the *Inquiry*; see Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 274; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 300.

Fischer's second and the third stages could be reduced to one phase. After all, Kant cited Shaftesbury (stage two) and Hume (stage three) together in the *Announcement* ("Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume"). See Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 298; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 311. The *Announcement* referred to Rousseau's ideas about primitive and wise innocence (stage three); see Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 298; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 312. Yet, as noted, it praised Shaftesbury's moral philosophy (stage two). Finally, the *Observations* belongs to stage three, since the essay was influenced by Rousseau, as well as to stage two, given its concept of moral feeling and defense of a moral sense philosophy.

⁴¹ On Kant's philosophy as empiricist during this time, see Emilio Oggioni, *Kant empirista (1756-1766)* (Milano: Trevisini, 1948); for the influence of Crusius on Kant, see 39-43. The empiricist elements in Kant's writings of 1762 to 1765 should not be overemphasized, however, as Oggioni tends to do. It would be wrong to claim that Kant was an outright empiricist at this time. Kant's philosophy still operated within a rationalist framework, which provided a space in which to make empiricist claims. For a balanced view of Kant's empiricism and rationalism in the 1760s, see Sandro Travaglia, *Metafisica ed etica in Kant: dagli scritti precritici alla Critica della ragion pura* (Padova: Cedam, 1972), 97-104.

construction of mathematical concepts, and mathematical and philosophical cognition differ in significant ways (KrV A712-738 / B740-766); metaphysics is the science of the limits of human reason;⁴² and the metaphysical foundations of aesthetics and of ethics should be kept apart. At the same time, several points of contrast with the Critical philosophy also emerge. Kant had not yet developed the arguments for the transcendental unity of apperception, the noumenal/phenomenal and transcendental/empirical distinctions, the ideality of space and time, respect for the moral law, his new understanding of "aesthetic" judgment, or the transcendental principle of the purposiveness of nature. Moreover, he would eventually reject proofs of God such as the one he endorsed in the *Inquiry* and *The Only Possible Argument*. His conception of freedom would also develop significantly and become richer, containing more nuances.⁴³ Although in the three *Critiques* philosophy would retain a practical orientation and the notion of "experience" would continue to play an indispensable role, transcendental Critical philosophy *per se* would have no room for empirical psychology and pragmatic anthropology. Kant banished them from the domain of pure philosophy. The intriguing story of why he banished

⁴² This claim is also found in Kant's *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*. Idem, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, in his *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 301-359, a translation of Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*, in AA 2: 315-73. See idem, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, 354; *Träume*, in AA 2: 368. See also Kant's statement of the limits of the powers of understanding in *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, 316; *Träume*, in AA 2: 328. Kant probably composed *Dreams* in 1764 and 1765 (in any case, before 31 January 1766); it was published in 1766. See the introduction, in *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, xxxvii. Since this fascinating work about the limits and possibility of metaphysics merits careful analysis and more attention than can be given at this time, it is not examined at length here.

⁴³ For a discussion of Kant's views of freedom from 1764-1765 on, see Paul Guyer, *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 127ff.; and Bonetti, *Studi*, 47-87.

them, however, must be left to another study to investigate.⁴⁴

A brief comment on this article's method is in order. Kant had several diverse influences during this period (Rousseau, Crusius, Lambert, Baumgarten, Meier, Shaftesbury, Hume, Hutcheson) and he wrote in a variety of genres, so it is difficult to reduce his view of philosophy to a simple, singular stance. It would be a mistake to search for the Kantian view of 1764-1765. Moreover, we should be sensitive to the role of audience, authorial intention, genre, tone, and style when interpreting such diverse texts and attributing a position to Kant.⁴⁵ For instance, all of these texts (with the exception of some Latin notes to the *Observations*) were written in German when they could have been written in Latin, as were Kant's academic theses, including the later *Inaugural Dissertation*. Kant was writing primarily for German-speaking readers and attempted (with the

⁴⁴. For discussion of the texts considered here, see the following works. Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors* (1969; rpt. London: Thoemmes Press, 1996); Mariano Campo, *La genesi del criticismo kantiano* (Varese: Magenta 1953); Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought*, trans. James Haden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Monique David-Ménard and Alison Ross, "Kant's 'An Essay on the Maladies of the Mind' and *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*," *Hypatia* 15 (2000): 82-98; Daniel Dumouchel, *Kant et la genèse de la subjectivité esthétique* (Paris: Vrin, 1999); Augusto Guzzo, *Kant precritico* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1924); Manfred Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768-1800* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987); idem, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); *New Essays on the Precritical Kant*, ed. Tom Rockmore (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2001); Martin Schönfeld, *The Philosophy of the Young Kant: The Precritical Project* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Paul Arthur Schilpp, *Kant's Pre-Critical Ethics* (1938; rpt. Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1998); Joseph Schmucker, *Die Ursprünge der Ethik Kants in seinen vorkritischen Schriften und Reflexionen* (Meisenheim: Anton Hain, 1961); Susan M. Shell, *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Keith Ward, *The Development of Kant's Views of Ethics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972).

⁴⁵. On Kant's style, see Willi Goetschel, *Constituting Critique: Kant's Writing as Critical Praxis*, trans. Eric Schwab (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994).

exception of the *Inquiry*) to appeal to a broader, popular audience—and, in the case of the *Announcement*, even to awaken student interest in attending his lectures. Nevertheless, I assume in this paper that nothing in the tone, genre, or style of any of these five texts makes it impossible to characterize Kant's conception of philosophy. Moreover, an examination of these literary traits would have made this paper excessively lengthy. Finally, Kant himself rather boldly declares in an 8 April 1766 letter to Moses Mendelssohn: "I shall never say anything I do not believe."⁴⁶ Accordingly, as long as we are aware of and sensitive to these peculiar stylistic challenges, the fact that a text has a distinctive tone does not mean that we cannot view its statements about philosophy as Kant's considered views.

Let us now turn to the texts, which will be discussed in the order in which they were listed in the abstract and first paragraph. Since the *Inquiry* contains Kant's most explicit statement of his method during this time, the Prize Essay merits particularly careful attention.

I. A New Method for Metaphysics: "A Happy Outcome for Abstract Philosophy"⁴⁷

Kant wrote the *Inquiry concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality* by the end of December 1762, but it was not published until April 1764. It was written for the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin and, unsurprisingly, has a serious, scholarly tone. Kant himself was not happy with the precision and appearance of the essay. He confessed in the *Inquiry* itself that its "care, precision, and elegance" left something to be desired, since it was written too hastily.⁴⁸ (He would make similar complaints and observations at least four times during this

⁴⁶ Kant, *Correspondence*, 90; in AA 10: 69.

⁴⁷ The phrase is found in Kant's letter to Johann Formey of 28 June 1763. Kant, *Correspondence*, 69; in AA 10: 42.

⁴⁸ Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 275; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 301.

period).⁴⁹ In a letter of 28 June 1763, Kant asked Johann Formey, permanent secretary of the Academy, to allow him to amend the essay before its publication, but Kant never did this.⁵⁰

The Prize Question for the year 1763, publicly announced by the Academy on 4 June 1761, concerned whether metaphysical truths in general, and the first principles of natural theology and morality in particular, admitted of distinct proofs to the same degree as geometrical truths. In responding to the *Preisfrage*, Kant intended not only to win the Prize but also to modify the nature and method of metaphysics. But what kind of metaphysics? Kant wrote in German for the Academy of Sciences in Berlin. His article is meant to reform, and thus indirectly contribute to, German school metaphysics in the versions of Leibniz, Wolff, and Baumgarten and their followers, rather than Popular philosophy. Kant's correspondence with Johann Heinrich Lambert, hardly a Popular philosopher, seems to confirm this point. In letters by Lambert to Kant (13 November 1765) and by Kant to Lambert (31 December 1765), it is clear that the two conceived of their approaches as being in harmony. Lambert expressed to Kant his approval of *The Only Possible Argument*,⁵¹ and proclaimed, "[we] have heretofore hit upon almost the same investigations without knowing it."⁵² Kant responded to Lambert's letter with similar comments on the affinity of their methods. In the 31 December 1765 letter, Kant referred to "the fortunate agreement of our [their] methods."⁵³ As of late 1765, then, Kant's views of philosophy had not yet radically diverged

⁴⁹ On *Only Possible Argument*, see Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 111; *Beweisgrund*, in AA 2: 66. On the *Inquiry*, see *Announcement*; idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 294; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 308. On *Dreams*, see the 8 April 1766 letter to Mendelssohn; Kant, *Correspondence*, 90; in AA 10: 69. Moreover, on the "hasty completion" of the *Inaugural Dissertation*, see Kant's 2 September 1770 letter to Lambert; Kant, *Correspondence*, 108, in AA 10: 98.

⁵⁰ Kant, *Correspondence*, 69; in AA 10: 41.

⁵¹ Lambert to Kant, *Correspondence*, 77; in AA 10: 51.

⁵² Lambert to Kant, *Correspondence*, 79; in AA 10: 54.

⁵³ Kant to Lambert, *Correspondence*, 81; in AA 10: 55.

from the 1762/3 system to which the *Only Possible Argument* and the Prize Essay belong.

What did this "fortunate agreement" mean—what conception and method of philosophy did Lambert defend? Lambert, an important mathematician and physicist, blended Lockean empiricism with a rationalist position that was nevertheless distinct from its Cartesian, Leibnizian, and Wolffian forms. He devoted his attention to the mostly positive project of seeking the proper method in metaphysics and attempted to provide an adequate epistemological foundation for it. His article, *Treatise on the Criterion of Truth* (*Abhandlung vom Criterium veritatis*),⁵⁴ according to Eric Watkins, responded to the Berlin Academy's Prize Essay question of 1761, even if Lambert did not submit the piece.⁵⁵ The essay on the criterion of truth discussed the clarity and distinctness of concepts with reference to Descartes, Leibniz, and Wolff.⁵⁶ Lambert provided an account of how both the analytic and synthetic methods apply to "axiomatic" and "derivative" concepts, and how this apparatus can affect metaphysics. He continued to address philosophical issues in his comprehensive, two-volume *New Organon* (1764),⁵⁷ and he considered the philosophical method described in it to be close to the method Kant endorsed at this time. The *New Organon* focused on the transition between common cognition, which derives directly from experience, and

⁵⁴ Johann Heinrich Lambert, *Abhandlung vom 'Criterium veritatis'*, in *Kant-Studien*, ed. K. Bopp, Ergänzungsheft 36 (1915): 7-64.

⁵⁵ Eric Watkins, *Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason': Background Source Materials* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 231-32. However, Lambert *even more directly* responded to the Prize Question in an essay written in 1762, although he did not submit that article either. See Lambert, *Über die Methode, die Metaphysik, Theologie und Moral richtiger zu beweisen*, in *Kant-Studien*, ed. K. Bopp, Ergänzungsheft 42 (1918).

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Lambert, *Treatise on the 'Criterion of Truth'*, §§3-5, 26, 31, 36, 42-44, 56, 88 in Watkins, 233-51. English excerpts of the *Treatise* and *New Organon* are found in Watkins, *Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason'*, 233-57 and 257-74, respectively.

⁵⁷ Lambert, *Neues Organon*, ed. Günter Schenk (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1990).

scientific cognition, and on how the latter can involve *a priori* cognition.

By examining Kant's views of method, we can learn about his conception of philosophy. In the *Inquiry*, Kant presented the "substantial and essential" differences between cognition in mathematics and that in (theoretical and practical) philosophy.⁵⁸ He claimed that his treatise contains nothing but "certain" yet "empirical" propositions (*sichere Erfahrungssätze*) and the inferences drawn immediately from them.⁵⁹ Kant wished to avoid relying on the "doctrines of the philosophers" and on definitions (*Definitionen*), for the latter often lead to error.

In the first of four Reflections, Kant distinguished the synthetic method, which mathematics adopts, from the analytic method, which philosophy employs (or should employ). Synthesis is a stipulative (*willkürlich*) combination of concepts, whereas analysis makes a cognition distinct through the process of separation (*Absonderung*). In mathematics, a definition comes into being as a result of synthesis: this is "definition" in the strict sense. Unlike a philosophical definition/clarification (*Erklärung*), it is unproblematic. Philosophical definitions are the product of analysis and admit of less distinctness and completeness than mathematical definitions. In philosophy, Kant claimed, the concept of a thing is already given, albeit confusedly.⁶⁰ Determinations of the meaning of a word are never philosophical definitions; if they must be called definitions at all, they should be called only "grammatical" ones.⁶¹ Kant found fault here with Leibniz, who, Kant alleged, invented out of thin air concepts such as the slumbering monad. The analytic method that Kant proposed for metaphysics was Newtonian in spirit, not Leibnizian.

⁵⁸. Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 256; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 283.

⁵⁹. Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 247; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 275.

⁶⁰. Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 248; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 276.

⁶¹. Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 249; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 277.

Kant maintained that philosophy examines the universal *in abstracto* by means of words or linguistic signs, rather than, as in mathematics, *in concreto* through geometric figures, algebraic symbols, or visible signs.⁶² Because these visible signs can be employed *in concreto*, their use is distinct from that of verbal signs (words).⁶³

Kant held that in philosophy, unlike mathematics, there are many unanalysable concepts and indemonstrable propositions. The distinctness of philosophical cognition and the possibility of valid inferences in philosophy depend upon analysis. Such analysis inevitably leads to "uncommonly many" unanalysable concepts in metaphysics, such as the concepts of "representation," "being next to each other," and "being after each other."⁶⁴ Kant thought these notions are hardly analyzable at all (*beinahe gar nicht*). Some concepts are partially analyzable. The latter include not only space and time, but also the feelings of the sublime, beautiful, disgusting, and "so forth."

It is noteworthy that Kant aimed to understand the "springs of our nature,"⁶⁵ since he would take up this anthropological focus in the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*.⁶⁶ This suggests that even though the *Observations* made use of a very different style and genre, it was consistent with the aims of the Prize Essay. Note Kant's reference to an observer (*Aufmerker*) in the same *Inquiry*

⁶² Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 251; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 278-9.

⁶³ Claudio La Rocca, *Esistenza e Giudizio. Linguaggio e ontologia in Kant* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 1999), 56.

⁶⁴ Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 252; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 280.

⁶⁵ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 253; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 280.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of the sublime and moral feeling in the *Observations and Remarks*, see Robert R. Clewis, "Kant's Distinction between True and False Sublimity," in *Kant's Observations and Remarks: A Critical Guide*, ed. Susan Shell and Richard Velkley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 118-132. For Kant's early theories of the sublime, grotesque, and enthusiasm, see Robert R. Clewis, *The Kantian Sublime and the Revelation of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 32-55.

passage: "In the case of these concepts [the sublime, beautiful, disgusting, and so forth], a careful observer will notice that the analyses are far from satisfactory."⁶⁷

Kant stated that the object of philosophy, unlike that of mathematics, is difficult and involved. For instance, "philosophers" have not yet succeeded in explaining the concept of freedom in terms of its elements (*Einheiten*), the simple and familiar concepts of which the complex concept is composed.⁶⁸ With its claim that certain fundamental spatial relations such as "behind" and "above" are indefinable, the *Inquiry* demonstrated a novel concern with language, with the possibility of the *definition* of fundamental metaphysical concepts such as space.

In light of Kant's disapproval of Leibniz and "the philosophers," we can claim that Kant was critical of German school metaphysics in some respects. He wished to amend it. Accordingly, he attempted to give metaphysics a new method in the *Inquiry*. As we shall see, Kant endorsed and employed this method in the other writings of this period. If this is correct, Kant retained this view of the method of philosophy during the period under examination.

In the second Reflection, Kant claimed that his method is the "only" method for attaining the highest possible degree of certainty in metaphysics. What is metaphysics? It is "nothing other than the philosophy of the fundamental principles of our cognition."⁶⁹ Kant's definition closely followed that of Baumgarten, who had defined metaphysics as the science of the first principles in human cognition (*scientia primorum in humana cognitione principiorum*).⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 253; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 280. He mentions *Beobachtung* (observation) on the same page, at the end of this paragraph.

⁶⁸ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 255; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 282.

⁶⁹ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 256; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 283.

⁷⁰ Alexander Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* (Halle and Magdeburg: Hemmerde, 1739, 1st edition), Prolegomena, §1. *Metaphysica* is reprinted at Kant, AA 15: 5-54 and 17: 5-226. *Metaphysica* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1963) is a reprint of the 7th edition of 1779.

Philosophy, including metaphysics, should not attempt to imitate the method used by mathematics in contexts where it cannot (yet) be employed. The definition of the object or concept is nearly always the last thing to be known.⁷¹ The metaphysical concept is already given, but in a confused way. The philosopher understands the word in question well enough not to misuse it, but he lacks its real definition. That is why he needs to search for the distinct, complete, and determinate concept.⁷²

Once metaphysics has analyzed fundamental concepts and offered *Erklärungen* of these simple cognitions, thereby understanding them distinctly (*deutlich*), it will then be in a position to proceed synthetically.⁷³ It can then subsume compound cognitions under simpler ones, as does mathematics. Kant's hope that metaphysics would one day proceed synthetically, using these fundamental concepts obtained through the method of analysis, is one reason why his philosophy at this time counts as an empiricist *rationalism*.

In the third Reflection, Kant referred to metaphysics as "nothing but philosophy applied to insights of reason which are more general."⁷⁴ Kant claimed that metaphysics is capable of enough certainty to produce conviction. The certainty of the first fundamental truths of metaphysics is of the same kind as that of any other rational cognition, excluding mathematics. In answering the *Preisfrage* in this way, Kant appealed to the notions of the formal and material principles of reason. The laws of Identity and of Contradiction act as first formal principles of human reason. The *material* first principles of reason are the unanalysable propositions discussed in the paragraphs above.

⁷¹ Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 256; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 283.

⁷² Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 256-57; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 284.

⁷³ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 263; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 290.

⁷⁴ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 266; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 292.

They function as first principles because they contain the grounds of other cognitions. Kant claimed that philosophy should take into account these material first principles and not adhere to formal principles alone. By themselves, he claimed, formal principles cannot prove anything. This point was aimed at Wolffian philosophy.

In the fourth and final Reflection, Kant discussed the distinctness and certainty of the fundamental principles of natural theology and morality, both of which presumably also fall under the domain of philosophy. The proof for the existence of God to which he referred is similar to the one in *The Only Possible Argument*,⁷⁵ and we need not examine it here. It should be noted that Kant claimed that the fundamental principles of natural theology are instances of *philosophical cognition*.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, he thought that judgments about God's free actions, justice, and goodness, could only *approximate* certainty (or have "moral" certainty). They could not be certain because they appeal to moral concepts that are themselves still obscure and improperly understood.⁷⁷

Kant held that we do not have a clear and distinct concept of moral phenomena. In the second section of this Reflection, Kant maintained that the fundamental principles of morality in their present state are not capable of the certainty that is necessary to produce conviction, since the moral concepts such as the fundamental notion of obligation lack "distinctness" and "certainty."⁷⁸ Kant drew a parallel between the methods of theoretical metaphysics and ethics. Like theoretical metaphysics, ethics has formal, first principles as well as material, indemonstrable principles. Furthermore, just as there is an unanalysable

⁷⁵ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 270; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 297; and idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 123-24; *Beweisgrund*, in AA 2: 78-79.

⁷⁶ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 270; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 296.

⁷⁷ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 271; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 297.

⁷⁸ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 272; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 298.

concept of what is encountered in the object of theoretical cognition, there is an unanalysable feeling of the good, the moral feeling. Practical philosophy should “analyze and render distinct the compound and confused concept of the good by showing how it arises from simpler feelings of the good.”⁷⁹ Practical philosophy is even more defective than speculative philosophy and metaphysics, however. For Kant believed that it had yet to be determined whether it was the *faculty of cognition*, or whether it was feeling, which decided the first principles of practical philosophy.⁸⁰ Given the praise of Hutcheson and other moral sense theorists, the *Inquiry* nevertheless suggested that Kant thought that *feeling* determines the first principles of practical philosophy. Kant would develop this notion in the *Observations*.

II. An Essay with, and on, Feeling: Toward the Revival of Philosophy

In the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (completed by October 1763 and published by 31 January 1764), the *Inquiry*'s hint that feeling determines the first principles of ethics is expressed as a bolder thesis. Kant maintained that the moral feeling—the feeling of the beauty and dignity of human nature—is the basis of obligation.⁸¹

By comparison with the *Inquiry*, the *Observations* lacks a scholastic tone and employs a flowery style that is not

⁷⁹. Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 273; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 299.

⁸⁰. Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 274-75; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 300.

⁸¹. Translations of the *Observations* are taken from Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, in Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, trans. Mary Gregor, Paul Guyer, et al., ed. Robert B. Loudon and Günter Zöllner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 23-62, a translation of *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, in AA 2: 205-56. Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 31; *Beobachtungen*, in AA 2: 217. On the *Observations* as between aesthetics and ethics, see Lucia Zani, “Una ricerca ai confini fra l’etica e l’estetica. Le osservazioni sul sentimento del bello e del sublime,” *Sapientia* 9 (1956): 191-205.

far from the "jest" and "jocular profundity" (to echo Moses Mendelssohn's reaction to *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*⁸²) of *Maladies of the Head* and *Dreams* (1766). The *Observations*' style indicates that Kant did not consider the academic essay to be appropriate for his broader, German-speaking audience. (In light of works that precede the *Dreams*, such as the *Observations* and especially the *Maladies*, the secondary literature's tendency to see the *Dreams* as unique in style and tone is somewhat misleading.) The informal *Observations*, unlike the *Inquiry*, is not a meta-philosophical discussion of metaphysics, natural theology, or ethics, but instead makes empirical claims in moral philosophy, aesthetics, and anthropology. As Dieter Henrich noted, the *Observations* is part of an empirical reformulation of parts of the 1762/3 system that includes the *Inquiry*.⁸³ Yet "reformulation" may even be too strong, for it appears that the 1762/3 system already adopted a method that synthesized empirical and rational elements. It is more accurate to say that the work is part of an empirical *formulation* and expression of parts of the 1762/3 system.

Toward the beginning of the work, Kant stated that he casts his glance on the peculiarities of human nature more with the eye of an *observer* than of a philosopher.⁸⁴ Kant might have claimed to adopt this perspective in part to allow him to employ (perhaps even excuse) the essay's unique style. His tone is light, ironic, and glib, even at places lyrical and poetic.

⁸². In a non-extant letter written some time between 7 February and 8 April 1766, Mendelssohn claimed that the *Dreams*' tone was "between jest and earnest." See Kant, *Correspondence*, 92, n. 1. In his comments in the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* IV, 2 (1767), on 281, Mendelssohn wrote of the "jocular profundity with which this little book is written." Kant, *Correspondence*, 92, n. 2.

⁸³. Dieter Henrich, "Kant's Denken 1762/3: Über den Ursprung der Unterscheidung analytischer und synthetischer Urteile," in *Studien zu Kants philosophischer Entwicklung*, ed. Heinz Heimsoeth, Dieter Henrich, and Giorgio Tonelli (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967), 9-38, on 36.

⁸⁴. Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 23; *Beobachtungen*, in AA 2: 207.

How are we to view this work that underwent at least six editions in Kant's lifetime?⁸⁵ Kant's characterization of his writing as observations of *human nature* offers us a clue. The essay contains what Kant would later call pragmatic anthropology, though at the time he did not clearly distinguish between aesthetics and pragmatic anthropology and indeed did not lecture on anthropology until 1772.⁸⁶

Kant's later, Critical philosophy would keep apart the anthropological and transcendental elements. He adopted a "pure" method in the very *Critique* (1790) that contains *Analytics of the beautiful and of the sublime*. Given the chance to include anthropology in the third *Critique*, Kant chose not to do so, even though Kant had been lecturing on anthropology since the winter semester of 1772-1773. Rather than pursuing the reasons for this deletion, however, let us examine what the *Observations* reveals about Kant's views of the nature, method, and significance of philosophy.

Instead of claiming that Kant momentarily took a drastic turn and renounced the metaphysical method presented in the *Inquiry*, it is more accurate to say that in the *Observations* Kant chose to formulate parts of that system and to criticize school philosophy in a different genre, writing for a wider audience. The disapproval of German scholasticism is expressed in a freer style and tone, but it is still noticeable.

For instance, the *Observations* at once targeted both late medieval scholasticism and German school philosophy in a manner reminiscent of *The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures*. The latter criticized "brooding over deep matters" and falling into grotesque, bizarre ideas (*Fratzen*).⁸⁷ Kant did not give German scholasticism its own place in the brief "history" of taste, science, and

⁸⁵. See the bibliography in Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 565-66.

⁸⁶. Paul Guyer, introduction, in Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 19.

⁸⁷. Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 100; *Falsche Spitzfindigkeit*, in AA 2: 57.

culture found at the end of the *Observations*. He lumped it together with late medieval scholasticism. "The monastic vows made out of a great number of useful people numerous societies of industrious idlers, whose brooding way of life made them fit for concocting thousands of scholastic grotesqueries [*Schulfratzen*], which went thence out into the larger world and spread their kind about."⁸⁸ Kant next turned to the corrupt, degenerate taste of his own day, thereby jumping from medieval to German scholasticism and conceiving of both as unnatural and artificial. He claimed that he saw an "almost complete destruction" of the human genius. He expressed his wishes for its rebirth "by a kind of palingenesis."

In the 31 December 1765 letter to Lambert, Kant would make a strikingly similar claim about destruction and rebirth. He told Lambert about the current lack of taste as well as the "euthanasia of erroneous philosophy," a self-destruction that would lead to the revival of "true philosophy."⁸⁹ Kant maintained that philosophy would come to life after the destruction that it had brought upon itself: "total dissolution" would precede the start of a "new creation." It is noteworthy that Kant held Lambert to be "the greatest genius in Germany,"⁹⁰ since the short history of taste in the *Observations* referred to genius. Kant thought both he and Lambert would play a role in the rebirth of philosophy. Kant concluded the brief history as follows: "Finally, after the human genius had happily lifted itself out of an almost complete destruction by a kind of palingenesis, we see in our own times the proper taste for the beautiful and noble blossom in the arts and sciences as well as with regard to the moral."⁹¹ It appears that Kant saw himself and Lambert as part of this revival.

⁸⁸ Idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 62; *Beobachtungen*, in AA 2: 256.

⁸⁹ Idem, *Correspondence*, 82; in AA 10: 56-57.

⁹⁰ Idem, *Correspondence*, 81; in AA 10: 54.

⁹¹ Idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 62; *Beobachtungen*, in AA 2: 256.

It is worth stating again, before concluding this section, that the *Observations* was consistent with the *Inquiry*, an empirical statement of its principles. The *Observations* applied the latter's method. It did *not* offer definitions of aesthetic terms and concepts, though a reader could have expected precisely that from the first section.⁹² To have started with stipulative definitions would have meant that Kant was attempting to imitate the method of mathematics. Instead, Kant offered observations (*Beobachtungen*). He gave many examples of objects that elicited the experiences of beauty and sublimity. For instance: "The night is *sublime*, the day is *beautiful*.... The sublime *touches*, the beautiful *charms*."⁹³ Kant analyzed what was given in experience, in order to remove ambiguities surrounding aesthetic concepts and to arrive at a better understanding of the empirical data.

Kant concluded the *Observations* with the claim that moral philosophy, and education broadly construed, should raise the moral feeling in the heart of every "young citizen of the world" into an active sentiment.⁹⁴ The conviction that philosophy should be useful for life and cultivate the moral feeling, and that ethics should be based on this feeling, developed further in the marginal notes written in the *Observations*. Moreover, all of this is largely consistent with the *Inquiry*, which endorsed moral feeling (albeit timidly) and in its own way counted as an empirical philosophy with rationalist elements. As we have seen, in the *Inquiry* Kant attempted to write a treatise that contained only empirical propositions that were certain.⁹⁵

⁹² Guido Morpurgo-Tagliabue, introduction, in Kant, *Osservazioni sul sentimento del bello e del sublime*, trans. Laura Novati (Milano: RCS Rizzoli, 1989), 28. Morpurgo-Tagliabue claims that in the 1760s Kant wanted to be a proper empiricist, not asking *why* but being content with a description of the *that*; see Morpurgo-Tagliabue, in Kant, *Osservazioni*, 30. Nonetheless, Kant's rationalism should not be overlooked.

⁹³ Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 24; *Beobachtungen*, in AA 2: 209; original emphasis.

⁹⁴ Idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 62; *Beobachtungen*, in AA 2: 256.

⁹⁵ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 247; *Untersuchung*, in AA 2: 275.

Furthermore, the notes in the *Observations* made use of the Prize Essay's distinction between analytic and synthetic methods.

III. Zetetic philosophy and analysis: applying the method in the notes

Richard Velkley fittingly writes, "[w]hereas most scholars look at the *Remarks* only for aphorisms of tantalizing biographical interest, one must disclose that it contains a complex argumentation about the meaning of philosophy."⁹⁶ Because Kant wrote these notes without the intent to publish them, presumably we can take their claims as expressing his considered views. What, then, is Kant's conception of philosophy in the notes that he wrote in his personal copy of the *Observations* between, approximately, 1764 and 1765?

It is useful to recall that, according to the 31 December 1765 letter to Lambert, Kant planned to provide concrete examples of how to apply his (the proper) procedure of metaphysics in two essays, "Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Philosophy" and "Metaphysical Foundations of Practical Philosophy."⁹⁷ Let us therefore consider metaphysics in both its theoretical and practical forms, beginning with the former.

Theoretical metaphysics indicates when incorrect principles have been adopted. To accomplish this, it uses the method of doubt. "One could say that metaphysics is a science of the limits of human reason. Its doubts eliminate useless, not useful, certainty. Metaphysics is useful in that it eliminates appearance that can be harmful."⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Richard Velkley, *Freedom and the End of Reason: On the Moral Foundation of Kant's Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 51.

⁹⁷ Kant, *Correspondence*, 82; in AA 10: 56.

⁹⁸ Translations of the *Remarks in the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (*Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*) are my own. A complete translation is found in Robert R. Clewis, "Aesthetic and Moral Judgment: The Kantian Sublime in the *Observations*, the *Remarks* (translated),

Metaphysics eliminates worthless certainty but leaves useful certainty in place. Thus, even the theoretical branch of metaphysics, the branch that contains the science of the limits of human reason, has practical import. "Disputes in philosophy [*Weltweisheit*] are useful in that they promote freedom of the understanding and elicit a mistrust of the taught doctrine [*Lehrbegriff*], which must have been built on the ruins of another. One is still so happy in refutation."⁹⁹ Kant's reference to rebirth after destruction is remarkably reminiscent of the claims found at the end of the *Observations* and in his 1765 letter to Lambert.

The notes make use of the Prize Essay's method: the philosopher should analyze what is given to him in experience. The mistrust of traditional doctrine, German scholasticism, has a purgative effect, and this makes philosophical doubt healthy. The doubt is not dogmatic, but a doubt of delay, a suspension of judgment in the spirit of Socrates. The philosopher is a "zetetic" and a "seeker" (*Sucher*).¹⁰⁰ The philosopher should not fabricate ideas but analyze given concepts until he is confident they are certain. Contrasting his method with Rousseau's "synthetic" method, which begins with the human being in the state of nature, Kant described his method as "analytic" since it examines humanity in the civilized condition.¹⁰¹ He began with the complex concept, the human being in the civilized state, in order to arrive at the simple and clear, the basic form of the human being. Kant examined humanity as experienced around him in order to reach the essence of human nature (which was also an object of philosophical interest for Hume). In the *Announcement*, as we shall see, Kant would claim that we should first figure out who we are, and then ask what we should do. In the notes he seems to be doing just this.

The reflections also contain a theory of moral obligation and thereby add to what Kant had provisionally written

and the *Critique of Judgment*" Ph.D. diss. Boston College, 2003. Kant, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 181.

⁹⁹ Kant, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 150-51.

¹⁰⁰ Idem, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 175.

¹⁰¹ Idem, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 14.

about obligation in the *Inquiry*. The notes' theory is based on the concept of moral feeling. Placing ourselves in the moral position of others is a heuristic means (*medium heuristicum*) by which we feel the morally obligatory or forbidden.¹⁰² "There is a common sense regarding the true and the false that is nothing other than human reason, generally understood as the criterion of truth and falsity, and there is a common sense regarding good and evil that serves as the criterion of the latter. Opposing heads would eliminate logical certainty, opposing hearts would eliminate moral certainty."¹⁰³ Moral philosophy uses the principle of non-contradiction, which the Prize Essay had called a first formal principle of reason. Nevertheless, conformity to the common will is a matter of feeling, not understanding. On analogy with logical certainty, moral certainty is free from contradiction; this view survives, with slight modification, into the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*.¹⁰⁴ Kant also held that a moral act is moral only insofar as it is determined by the perfection of the will, and he claimed that in ethics and logic, one must teach youth to honor the common sense.¹⁰⁵

For Kant, there is an analogy between practical and theoretical metaphysics. The two branches of philosophy are, at least in principle, capable of the *same degree* of certainty, even if the certainty is achieved in different ways. The reason for this equality is that both branches appeal to the (Kant's) method of analysis. "Through analysis I will make it just as certain to a man that the lie is as detestable as the notion of a thinking body is absurd."¹⁰⁶ In ethics, feeling plays a role that is not found in theoretical philosophy, however. The analysis of a lie engages our capacity for feeling; a person who employs (the) common sense simply detests the notion. By contrast, the analysis of a thinking

¹⁰². Idem, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 156.

¹⁰³. Idem, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 156; cf. 181.

¹⁰⁴. Idem, *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals* (*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*), in AA 4: 422-23.

¹⁰⁵. Idem, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 44.

¹⁰⁶. Idem, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 49.

body does not have to appeal to feeling; one is supposed to *understand* that it is absurd. In short, theoretical certainty and moral certainty remain distinct, analogous but not identical. Logical common sense is likewise to be distinguished from moral common sense.¹⁰⁷

Were taste and aesthetics part of Kant's conception of philosophy in the marginalia? Kant wrote very little about aesthetics in the notes to the *Observations*, but what he did write is revealing and merits consideration. Just as Kant was planning to write "Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Philosophy" and "Metaphysical Foundations of Practical Philosophy," he had ideas for works on the metaphysical foundations of *aesthetics* and the metaphysical foundations of *moral philosophy*. "In the metaphysical foundations of aesthetics [*metaphysischen Anfangsgründen der Ästhetik*], the non-moral feeling is noticed in its diversity; in the foundations of moral philosophy [*Anfangsgründen der Sittlichen Weltweisheit*]¹⁰⁸, the moral feeling of human beings is noticed in its diversity, according to differences in gender, age, education, and government, in races and climates."¹⁰⁹ That Kant made plans to write a work on the metaphysical foundations of aesthetics seems to have been largely overlooked in the literature on Kant's aesthetics and its development.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷. On Kant's early ethics and conception of philosophy in relation to German school philosophy and to common sense, see Dieter Henrich, "Hutcheson and Kant," and Clemens Schwaiger, "The Theory of Obligation in Wolff, Baumgarten, and the Early Kant," in *Kant's Moral and Legal Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Otfried Höffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), respectively, 29-57 and 58-76. See also Ameriks, *Kant and the Historical Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chs. 4 and 5.

¹⁰⁸. The *Akademie* edition reads *Welt* instead of *Weltweisheit*, yet points out that Kant may be abbreviating *Weltweisheit*; see Kant, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 50. This claim seems plausible, and I read the word as *Weltweisheit*, as does the Meiner edition. See Kant, *Bemerkungen in den "Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen,"* ed. Marie Rischmüller (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1991), 42. This reading also makes more sense, given the context.

¹⁰⁹. Kant, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 49-50.

¹¹⁰. To my knowledge, no study has connected Kant's plan for such a

Kant kept apart the metaphysical foundations of aesthetics and moral philosophy. He resisted the chance to mix these together or to reduce aesthetics to an account of moral feeling. Moreover, the metaphysical foundations of aesthetics would have been quite *empirical*, since it was the examination of all of the types of non-moral feeling (*unmoralische Gefühl*), presumably the feelings of beauty, disgust, and sublimity (and the like) mentioned in the *Inquiry*. It probably would have been close to the blend of empirical psychology and anthropology that is found in the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. As we know from the 31 December 1765 letter to Lambert, a "metaphysical foundations" provides concrete examples of the proper application of Kant's experience-based method. This *empirical* aesthetics would have looked at the non-moral feelings insofar as they change with respect to gender, age, education, government, race, and climate. It would no doubt have made use of material that Kant was teaching in his lectures on physical geography, which he had been offering since summer 1756, when geography was still not widely taught at German universities, even if Kant was not the first to do so.

Is the planned work close to the third *Critique*? While Kant did refer to a "critique of taste, that is to say, aesthetics" in the contemporaneous *Announcement*, as we shall see, it would be a mistake to read the metaphysical foundations of aesthetics, given its concrete, empirical nature, as a close forerunner to a critique of the power of judgment. Kant at this time lacked a theory of the activity and principles of the power of judgment. He had no notion of the transcendental principle of the purposiveness of nature, had not developed a theory of reason as the faculty of the unconditioned, and had not yet explained how the faculties work together and relate to each other. All of this is of course crucial to the theory presented in the third *Critique*.

work, and the larger vision of philosophy of which it is a part, to the third *Critique* and its development.

Before we turn to *Essay on the Maladies of the Head*, let us observe that the notes claimed that philosophy can be restorative and therapeutic. Kant uses *Weltweisheit* in the practical, ancient sense that includes the love of wisdom and the mastery of desire. "Whoever knows how to satisfy his desires is prudent [*klug*]; whoever knows how to master them is wise. Philosophy."¹¹¹ In this sense philosophy is a way of life, not a speculative system, but living in accordance with virtue. *Weltweisheit* is intended to act as a cure for social problems associated with luxury, appearance, and illusion—all of which were familiar to the gallant *Magister* living in the relatively cosmopolitan Königsberg. By revealing the human being's place in the natural world, *Weltweisheit* was supposed to reveal when the human being had transgressed its providentially ordained, natural position. Philosophy removes the dangers posed by deceptive allurements such as artificial desires and inverted impulses.¹¹² Morality [*Moral*] and medicine were thus similar in at least one respect: it is better not to let the disease or corruption arise at all than to do so and then remove it.¹¹³ Kant made rhetorical and philosophical use of the medical metaphor in *Maladies of the Head*.

IV. The Philosopher as Doctor: The "Experimental Moralist"¹¹⁴

In late 1763 and early 1764, the citizens of Königsberg encountered the religious fanatic Jan Komarnicki and a young boy who, along with sheep, cows, and goats, were roaming around the city's periphery. The "goat prophet" incident gave rise to *Essay on the Maladies of the Head*, which was published anonymously between 13 and 27 February, 1764 in issues four to eight of *Königsbergische*

¹¹¹ Kant, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 179.

¹¹² Idem, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 45-46.

¹¹³ Idem, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 122.

¹¹⁴ The phrase is from an anonymous note concerning the incident that gave rise to the *Maladies*. It was written by Kant and published in *Königsbergische Gelehrte und Politische Zeitungen* in 1764. Kant, AA 2: 489.

Gelehrte und Politische Zeitungen, edited by Johann Georg Hamann.¹¹⁵ The *Maladies* combined the freeness of the *Observations* and the sarcasm of *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. As David Walford points out, the work may be regarded as linking the Rousseau-inspired *Observations*, with its claims about human beings and nations in the civilized condition, and the Swedenborg-inspired *Dreams*, with its themes of madness and delusion.¹¹⁶ Since the short piece is above all an examination of a phenomenon from the field of religious psychopathology, the following discussion can be relatively brief.

Though not exactly philosophical in character, the essay does offer a glimpse of how Kant viewed the philosophers and logicians of his day. The essay was clearly meant to be light and ironic, so it is unsurprising that Kant exaggerated somewhat and wrote hyperbolically throughout the essay. Nevertheless, the choice of target is significant: Kant aimed for German scholastic philosophy. For instance, he poked fun at contemporary "doctors of the understanding" who go by the name of logicians.¹¹⁷

Kant offered a typology of mental disease and gave each malady a name, following a medical procedure. "I see nothing better for me than to imitate the method of the physicians."¹¹⁸ The philosopher can prescribe the diet of the mind.¹¹⁹ The basic idea running throughout the piece derives from Rousseau, whom Kant actually referred to in a short comment published in *Königsbergische Gelehrte und Politische Zeitungen*.

¹¹⁵. See the editor's introduction in Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 63-64.

¹¹⁶. David Walford, introduction, in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, lxv.

¹¹⁷. Translations of the *Maladies* are taken from Kant, *Essay on the Maladies of the Head*, in idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 65-77, a translation of *Versuch über die Krankheiten des Kopfes*, AA 2: 257-71. Idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 65; *Krankheiten*, in AA 2: 260. On the *Maladies*, see Oscar Meo, *La malattia mentale nel pensiero di Kant* (Genova: Tilgher-Genova, 1982).

¹¹⁸. Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 66; *Krankheiten*, in AA 2: 260.

¹¹⁹. Idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 77; *Krankheiten*, in AA 2: 271.

In the anonymous note written by Kant and reported by Hamann in the paper's third issue of 1764,¹²⁰ Kant referred to the boy traveling with Komarnicki as a "perfect child."¹²¹ He considered the incident a good opportunity to verify Rousseau's theories of human nature and the natural human being. The character of the boy could be used by "an experimental moralist" to test the theories of "Herr Rousseau." Presumably, Kant conceived of himself as an experimental moralist and thought the boy confirmed Rousseau's ideas. We know from the notes to the *Observations* that Kant was impressed, even astonished, by Rousseau's writing style and opinions.¹²² Kant claimed that once he had gotten past Rousseau's style, the Genevan set him "upright" and put him on the right track.¹²³

Kant also mentioned Rousseau in the *Maladies* itself and made claims that were inspired by the Swiss philosopher.¹²⁴ "Artificial constraint and the luxury of a civil constitution hatches [*hekt*] punsters and subtle reasoners."¹²⁵ Natural man does not know any philosophy, for it is not a thing of needs. Kant quipped that the wise man, who is without passion and has an infinite amount of reason, can perhaps be found on the *moon*.¹²⁶ The wise man lives according to nature, but it is very difficult for us to do so. Since natural man is unconcerned about another's judgment, he is subject to hardly any foolishness and vanity.¹²⁷ His

¹²⁰ In light of Borowski's biography of Kant, we can attribute the anonymous assessment to Kant, according to the editor's introduction in Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 64.

¹²¹ Idem, AA 2: 489. A translation of the note is in idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 63-64.

¹²² Kant, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 43.

¹²³ Idem, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 44.

¹²⁴ Idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 73; *Krankheiten*, in AA 2: 267.

¹²⁵ Idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 65; *Krankheiten*, in AA 2: 259.

¹²⁶ Idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 68; *Krankheiten*, in AA 2: 262.

¹²⁷ Idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 75; *Krankheiten*, in AA 2: 269.

needs keep him close to experience and he barely notices that he requires understanding for his actions. In the civilized condition, by contrast, the sound understanding or common sense (*gesunder Verstand*), which is sufficient for the necessities and simple pleasures of life, can develop into the *refined* understanding, required for the sciences. Kant thought that this development could be problematic, as the *Inquiry, Observations, and Remarks* reveal.

Kant poked fun at academic philosophy, making scatological jokes in a way that anticipated a passage in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*.¹²⁸ He suggested that certain mental illnesses might actually be rooted in intestinal problems or gas.¹²⁹ A scholarly crier (*gelehrten Schreiern*) who writes a “miserable, brooding” article needs to have his problems purged—but he should do so quietly so as not to disturb the peace.¹³⁰

Genuine philosophy, Kant maintained, is like medicine. It can eradicate unhealthy desires and perhaps even correct false beliefs. The philosopher, like the physician, can help people with mental illness, but only if, as with “most of his other occupations, he requires no payment for this one.”¹³¹ Kant thus appeared to hint at his own financial difficulties, which the *Privatdozent* (lecturer) attempted to offset partially by lecturing regularly at Albertina University.

V. Helping students practice philosophy: starting with the easiest

Kant’s *Announcement of the Organization of His Lectures in the Winter Semester 1765-66* was composed in 1765 and published in the autumn of that year. The *Announcement* is extremely useful in determining Kant’s conception of philosophy at this time and merits special attention. Kant

¹²⁸. Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 336; *Träume*, in AA 2: 348.

¹²⁹. Idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 76; *Krankheiten*, in AA 2: 270.

¹³⁰. Idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 77; *Krankheiten*, in AA 2: 271.

¹³¹. Idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 77; *Krankheiten*, in AA 2: 271.

wrote the piece with the intention, *inter alia*, of awakening student interest in attending his lectures in the winter semester that began in 1765. As *Privatdozent*, Kant received no salary from the University and thus depended on the fees paid directly to him by his students for his income.¹³² In giving an overview of what his lectures would cover—metaphysics, logic, ethics, and physical geography—Kant revealed his conception of philosophy. There was an affinity between Kant's lectures, based on books by Meier and Baumgarten, and his own philosophical writings. As Riccardo Pozzo notes, there was a genuine connection between Kant's teaching and his research.¹³³

Let us begin with the comments on philosophy that Kant made from a pedagogical point of view, the perspective of a lecturer who, according to Herder, was a very talented and dedicated teacher.¹³⁴ If it seems odd to think of Kant as a popularizer of philosophical ideas, it helps to recall that this is the same man who, in a no longer extant letter of December 1759, apparently considered collaborating with Hamann on a project aimed at popularizing Newton's physics.¹³⁵ In a letter to Kant written in 1759, Hamann described the proposed work as a "philosophical book for children."¹³⁶

As the *Announcement* reveals, in 1765 Kant was likewise keen to make difficult philosophical material accessible to young people. He claimed that "the natural progress of human knowledge" proceeds in three stages, which correspond to understanding, reason, and science

¹³². See introduction, in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, li.

¹³³. Riccardo Pozzo, "Prejudices and Horizons: G. F. Meier's *Vernunftlehre* and its Relation to Kant," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 43 (2005): 185-202, on 188.

¹³⁴. Lewis White Beck quotes Herder's moving recollection of Kant's teaching in Beck, introduction, in Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Beck (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1959), xxii. Zweig also quotes it in Kant, *Correspondence*, 580-81.

¹³⁵. Zweig notes that Kant initiated the project; Kant, *Correspondence*, 61, n.3.

¹³⁶. Johann Georg Hamann, in Kant, *Correspondence*, 59; in AA 10: 21.

(*Wissenschaft*).¹³⁷ Understanding develops by using experience to arrive at intuitive (*anschauenden*) judgments. Echoing the *Inquiry*, Kant derided men of learning who display little understanding and who begin with science and reason rather than experience, empirical judgments, and sensory intuition.¹³⁸ Kant thought that because the academies adopted an inverted pedagogy and proceeded in the wrong direction, they sent students out into the world with their heads full of absurdities. Philosophy has a peculiar nature, he believed, and this requires the teacher to adopt a unique method.¹³⁹ Kant held that an age of maturity is required to do philosophy well, since one should start with intuitive concepts and what is known by experience, which the young of course lack. However, Kant thought that youth could offset the lack of life experience by reading travel writings and psychological novels.

Kant believed that rather than memorizing particular philosophical positions the student ought to learn how to *philosophize*. Kant would make the same claim in the first *Critique* (KrV A837 / B865) and the idea of thinking for oneself was central to his notion of enlightenment. A philosophy teacher, he says, should educate students to the point where in the future they are able to develop their own mature views. The instructor should not force students to memorize a philosophical system that falsely alleges to be complete (*fertig*).¹⁴⁰ Kant lamented the fact that philosophers think they can create their own standard of agreement. He expressed this sentiment in a nearly contemporaneous letter to Lambert (31 December 1765): "We lack a common standard with which to procure agreement" from "supposed philosophers."¹⁴¹ By contrast, in the

¹³⁷. Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 291; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 305.

¹³⁸. Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 292; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 306.

¹³⁹. Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 292; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 306.

¹⁴⁰. Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 293; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 307.

¹⁴¹. Idem, *Correspondence*, 82; in AA 10: 56.

historical and the mathematical sciences there is a common, shared standard for harmonizing one's efforts.¹⁴²

The method of instruction that is peculiar to philosophy is *zetetic*, Kant claimed, echoing the notes in the *Observations*. Like Socrates, the philosopher doubts or questions commonly held opinions. Philosophy employs the method of enquiry (*forschend*) and proceeds skeptically. In an 8 April 1766 letter to Mendelssohn in which Kant explained his use of a frivolous tone in the *Dreams*, Kant revealed that he desired to pull off the "dogmatic dress" of contemporary metaphysics and to treat its supposed insights "skeptically."¹⁴³ Only after reason has become more practiced, and only then in certain areas, should this method become dogmatic. (Note that Kant maintained that, after the philosopher had carried out the empirical, analytical work, there was room for dogmatic claims.) Any *positive* knowledge that the student acquired while forming and exercising his own judgment and drawing inferences for himself would be a welcome addition, but merely supplementary. Because of its Socratic nature, philosophy is more a way of conducting one's life and questioning common opinions than a way of communicating positive knowledge. Perhaps this is why Kant held, echoing a passage from the *Maladies*, that it is contrary to the nature of philosophy to be practiced as a means of earning one's living.¹⁴⁴

How did Kant conceive of the subjects he would teach? Kant wrote that his lectures would cover metaphysics, "the foremost science" (*Hauptwissenschaft*), logic, ethics, and physical geography, which Kant apparently considered to be outside the domain of philosophy *per se*.

In the section on metaphysics, Kant summarized his views about the analytic and synthetic methods that he had elaborated in the *Inquiry*. He referred to it as "a short and hastily composed work," and added: "For some

¹⁴² Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 294; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 308.

¹⁴³ Idem, *Correspondence*, 90; in AA 10: 70.

¹⁴⁴ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 294; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 308.

considerable time now I have worked in accordance with this scheme."¹⁴⁵ This plain endorsement of his earlier method shows that, at least publicly, Kant was not ready to announce any significant departure from the position of the *Inquiry*. Kant mentioned that he hoped "in the near future" to present a complete account of what would serve as the foundation of his lectures in metaphysics.¹⁴⁶

Until that work was completed, Kant wrote, he would apply "gentle pressure" to Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*, which would serve as the course's "rich" and "precise" textbook. Following Baumgarten, Kant stated that metaphysics includes empirical psychology, the experiential science of the human being. It also covers the nature of bodies and matter, both living and nonliving (*Leblose*), as well as ontology, the science that concerns "the more general properties of things." Metaphysics includes within it investigations in rational psychology, or examinations of the relation between spiritual and material beings, or how a mind can be located in a world. It encompasses natural theology, or the study of God as cause of all things and the world.¹⁴⁷ In teaching these concepts of school metaphysics, Kant employed a pedagogical method that can be seen as analogous to and based on the analytic method he defended in the *Inquiry*. He began with the easiest subjects and proceeded to the more difficult and abstract.

Logic is divided into two subfields: a critique and canon of sound human understanding (common sense), and the critique and canon of "real learning" and of "the whole of philosophy in its entirety."¹⁴⁸ The canon of common sense, a notion reminiscent of defenses of common sense put forward by Popular philosophers, corrects ordinary logical errors and fallacies. To teach this, Kant would use Georg

¹⁴⁵ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 294; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 308.

¹⁴⁶ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 294-95; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 308.

¹⁴⁷ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 295; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 309.

¹⁴⁸ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 296; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 310.

Meier's handbook *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre* (1752).¹⁴⁹ The second kind of logic, a "complete logic," is an organon of the sciences. It should be presented only after the philosopher has laid out and established some metaphysical claims.

Kant held that the study of ordinary understanding and cultivated reason leads to a "critique of taste" and "aesthetics." He wrote: "And in this, the very close relationship of the materials under examination leads at the same time, in the *critique of reason*, to pay some attention to the *critique of taste*, that is to say, *aesthetics*."¹⁵⁰ It is remarkable that Kant claimed that there is a "close relationship" of materials under examination and that the critique of reason leads naturally to a critique of taste. We are left to wonder in what exactly this relationship consists, for Kant did not elaborate. It is also worth noting that Kant conceived of the critique of taste (aesthetics) as an account of a non-moral feeling, a view that is close to that of the *Remarks*. Kant thus continued to separate aesthetics from practical philosophy.

Kant continued to endorse the *Inquiry's* view that moral philosophy (*moralische Weltweisheit*) is neither thoroughly grounded nor a science, although it has the illusion of being one since the moral feeling (*Sentiment*) is quite accurate and easy to apply. Kant thought that in ethics a question is often settled before any compelling reasons have been given. Kant maintained that by contrast theoretical metaphysics is not associated with such unjustified confidence.¹⁵¹ As we know from the Prize Essay and the *Remarks*, Kant had some ideas about how to give moral philosophy the certainty he thought it could attain.

¹⁴⁹ Georg Friedrich Meier, *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre* (Halle: Gebauer, 1752, 1st edition), reprinted in Kant, AA 16: 1-872. The unabridged *Vernunftlehre* (not the *Auszug*, an abridgment for courses) was published separately (Halle: Gebauer, 1752, 1st edition; reprinted at Halle: Hallescher Verlag, 1997-1999). Both *Auszug* and *Vernunftlehre* were published in two editions and a number of reprints. See Pozzo, "Prejudices and Horizons," 185, n. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 297; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 311; original emphasis.

¹⁵¹ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 297; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 311.

Kant's ethics lectures would be based on Alexander Baumgarten's *Initia Philosophiae Practicae Primae* (*Introduction to First Practical Philosophy*), published in 1760.¹⁵² Again echoing the Prize Essay on moral feeling, Kant explicitly mentions Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume.¹⁵³ Although Kant valued the "attempts" the moral sense theorists made, he planned to add to the precision and completeness of their views.

He thought that ethics should start with an inquiry into human nature (reminiscent of Hume), which he considered to be unchanging, and only then ask about what ought to happen.¹⁵⁴ Descriptive anthropology into the nature of the human being thus preceded normative ethical theory. Kant thought his method of practical philosophy improved upon that of the Greek and Roman philosophers. In light of Rousseau's discovery of human nature,¹⁵⁵ Kant considered humanity in both the civilized condition and in nature, and he distinguished between wise (civilized) innocence and primitive innocence.¹⁵⁶

So much for philosophy proper. Kant also advertised his upcoming lectures on physical geography.¹⁵⁷ However, there is little reason to think that he believed physical geography was part of philosophy strictly speaking rather than a historical, positive body of knowledge.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the study of physical geography did support the broader,

¹⁵² Alexander Baumgarten, *Initia Philosophiae Practicae Primae* (Halle: Hemmerde, 1760, 1st edition). Reprinted at Kant, AA 19: 07-91.

¹⁵³ Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 298; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 311.

¹⁵⁴ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 298; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 311.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. idem, *Bemerkungen*, in AA 20: 59.

¹⁵⁶ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 298; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 312.

¹⁵⁷ Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 298-99; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 312-13.

¹⁵⁸ For an alternative view that Kant understood his physical geography lectures as a type of worldly *philosophy*, see Holly Wilson's article, "Is Kant's Worldly Concept of Philosophy Really 'Regional Philosophy?'" in *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Kant Kongress* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, forthcoming).

moral goals of Kantian education and thus agreed with the practical aims of his philosophy at this time.¹⁵⁹ By lecturing on geography, Kant wished to report to young people who naturally lacked life experience what explorers and natural scientists thought about the world at the time. He intended his geography lectures to broaden the experience of his students, in order to help them overcome the arrogance they might acquire were they merely to memorize a system of philosophy. Kant aimed to educate youth so that they did not learn to reason speciously without adequate knowledge of the world. Kant thus believed that studying geography, like learning to philosophize, had practical dimensions. He cared about educating students as persons, not just about explicating the claims of this emerging academic discipline for its own sake. This conviction ran parallel to his view that philosophy involved actively thinking for oneself rather than just memorizing philosophical systems. In short, the study of geography provided positive knowledge, but it also served a moral purpose.¹⁶⁰

It is worth noting, before concluding, that Kant's interest in geography reveals that the forty-one year old philosopher considered himself a man of the world. Geography requires a cosmopolitan point of view, for it examines the world's "countries and seas," as well as its products, customs, industry, trade, and population.¹⁶¹ Kant seemed proud to be a part of his "sociable century," even if, as the notes to the *Observations* reveal, its excesses and luxuries sometimes disillusioned him.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ For (problematic) edition of Kant's physical geography lectures, published during Kant's lifetime and edited by Friedrich Theodor Rink (1802), see Kant, AA 9: 151-436. For the more reliable (1757/59) Holstein-Beck lecture on physical geography, see Kant, AA 26: 7-320.

¹⁶⁰ On Kant's anthropology and physical geography, see Günter Zöller, "Welt und Erde: Kants Anthropologie in geopolitischer Hinsicht," in *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Kant Kongress* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, forthcoming).

¹⁶¹ Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 299; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 312-13.

¹⁶² Idem, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, 299; *Nachricht*, in AA 2: 313.

VI. Conclusion

We can conclude that these texts offer a remarkably consistent view of philosophy, a result that is striking given the diversity of these texts with respect to tone, genre, and audience. In the *Observations*, *Remarks*, *Maladies*, and *Announcement*, Kant offered an empirical formulation of the 1762/3 system and applied some form of the analytic method of the Prize Essay, starting with what was given in experience and easiest to examine. He criticized contemporary German philosophy and thereby attempted to contribute to and modify it. The *Inquiry* employed the German scholastic language of clarity and distinctness, which can be traced back at least to Descartes. At the same time, Kant distanced himself from and attempted to amend *Schulphilosophie* metaphysics. More generally, at this time Kant was questioning the benefits of the arts and sciences, including theoretical and practical philosophy in its current state. The notes to the *Observations* reveal that the *Privatdozent* was working out how he conceived of his relation to the German academy—though it would be wise not to reduce Kant's views of philosophy merely to his economic status or similar biographical facts.

What have we gained by looking at these texts? Although Kant's position in 1781 differed in very significant ways from that of 1764-1765, certain elements of Kant's early conception of philosophy were preserved. To quote again from the letter to Lambert written on the last day of 1765, Kant awaited a great "revolution" in the sciences and believed he was witnessing the end of erroneous philosophy, a destruction caused by that wayward philosophy itself. He thought this self-inflicted demise would give rise to vital, "true philosophy."¹⁶³ He saw himself as part of this revival of philosophy, for he offered a method to reform the metaphysical foundations of theoretical (natural) and practical philosophy. Kant wrote that he planned to postpone "a little while"¹⁶⁴ his work on a book entitled

¹⁶³. Idem, *Correspondence*, 82; in AA 10: 57.

¹⁶⁴. Idem, *Correspondence*, 82; in AA 10: 56.

something close to *Proper Method of Metaphysics*, the title the publisher J. J. Kanter gave the volume in the Autumn Book Fair catalogue for 1765.¹⁶⁵ This is not the place to speculate about how close the unwritten work would have been to the first *Critique*. Nevertheless, a few points of similarity and difference between the early and Critical conceptions of philosophy were mentioned in this article's introduction. Suffice it to say here that in texts such as "What is Enlightenment?" and the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant continued to maintain that philosophy should encourage people, including students, to think for themselves and learn to philosophize. The Critical philosophy retained the conviction expressed in various ways in the *Remarks*, *Maladies*, and *Announcement* that philosophy should be oriented toward the practical or, to use the first *Critique*'s language, should address the essential ends of reason. This orientation can be discerned in the first *Critique*'s famous notion of denying knowledge to make room for faith (KrV, Bxxx).

¹⁶⁵ According to Zweig, Lambert refers to the title as *Eigentliche Methode der Metaphysic*. See Kant, *Correspondence*, 83, n.1. For the reference to this title in Lambert's letter (13 November 1765), see Kant, *Correspondence*, 77; in AA 10: 51. Kant uses the phrase "the proper method of metaphysics" in his 31 December 1765 reply to Lambert; Kant, *Correspondence*, 82; in AA 10: 56. See also the introduction in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, lxxii.