

Is Kantianism The Ultimate Form of Western Philosophy?

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Engraving of Kant at his desk (Birck, 18th century)

In “Kantian Futurism,” I argued that

all foreseeably future philosophy worldwide *will be a series of positive or negative footnotes to Kant*. Moreover, as regards negative footnotes, the 140-year-long anti-Kantian tradition of Analytic philosophy is in fact now coming to an end, as post-classical Analytic philosophy crashes, burns, and goes down forever into the ash-heap of history.... Therefore, (i) the times they are a-changing, and (ii) the near-future emergence of some or another creatively revised-&-updated version of Kant’s philosophy, as the central and

dominant world philosophy, is historically inevitable. For all these reasons, *forward to Kant!* must be humankind's philosophical futurist rallying cry. (Hanna, 2024a: p. 5; see also Hanna, 2008)

But on what rational grounds can Kantianism justify its claim to be the ultimate form of Western philosophy? This in turn is equivalent to the question, what is Kant's Critical and post-Critical philosophy and how can it be rationally justified?

As is well-known, during his "pre-Critical" period starting in the 1740s Kant was a fully committed classical Rationalist metaphysician in the tradition of Leibniz and Christian Wolff. During his pre-Critical period, to the middle-to-late 1760s and the early 1770s, 60s and the early 1770s, when, by his own retrospective testimony in 1783, he was suddenly jolted out of his Leibnizian and Wolffian dreams by a skeptical Humean Empiricist wake-up call:

I openly confess that my remembering David Hume was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction. I was far from following him in the conclusions at which he arrived ... [But if] we start from a well-founded, but undeveloped, thought which another has bequeathed to us, we may well hope by continued reflection to advance further than the acute man to whom we owe the first spark of light. (*Prolegomena* 4: 260)

It's plausible to think that this *particular* wake-up call happened in July 1771, when Kant would have read a German translation of the "Conclusion" section of book I of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), published in the *Königsberger gelehrte Zeitung*, entitled "Nachdenken eines Skeptikers" ("Night Thoughts of a Skeptic"). In the "Conclusion," Hume re-states the main claims of his skeptical Empiricist analysis of the concepts of causation and causal necessity. Kant's reading knowledge of English was fairly limited, so it seems quite likely that he never read either the *Treatise* or the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) themselves, although he must have originally encountered Hume's ideas and writings in the 1750s or 60s, in German translation,¹ in order to be able to "remember" them in 1771. It's also quite possible that Kant's memory of Hume was further jogged by reading a 1772 German translation of the Scottish common sense philosopher James Beattie's highly influential 1770 *Essay on The Nature and Immutability of Truth*, in which Beattie carefully describes and then vigorously attacks Hume's skeptical Empiricist analysis of causation and causal necessity. In any case, in the *Treatise* and again in the first *Enquiry*, Hume defends and develops three crucial theses, each of which importantly influenced Kant, whether positively or negatively, after 1771: (i) all

¹ The first German translation of Hume's first *Enquiry* was published in 1755.

human cognition is strictly limited as to its content, truth, and epistemic scope by sensory experience, (ii) the class of all judgments is exhaustively divided into those concerning “relations of ideas” (that is, necessary a priori definitional or stipulative truths, for example, truths of logic or mathematics) and those concerning “matters of fact” (that is, contingent a posteriori experimental truths, for example, truths of natural science), and (iii) all our judgments concerning supposedly necessary causal relations in fact refer exclusively to experience and matters of fact, and their content and justification is determined solely by non-rational “custom” or “habit,” not reason. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant fully accepts a carefully qualified version of Hume’s thesis (i), namely: (i*) all human cognition begins in causally-triggered sense experience, but at the same time neither the form nor the content of human cognition is reducible to or determined by causally-triggered sense experience and/or matters of fact, that is, the form and the content of human cognition is necessarily underdetermined by all actual or possible sense experience and/or contingent facts, that is, the form and content of human cognition necessarily is, at least in part, *non-empirical or a priori*, and also firmly rejects Hume’s theses (ii) and (iii).

In another fundamentally important and closely-related autobiographical remark in the *Reflexionen*, Kant says that “the year ‘69 gave me great light” (R 5037, 18: 69). By this, I think he means that in that particular year—falling exactly midway between his seminal 1768 essay “Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Directions in Space” (aka “Directions in Space”) and his breakthrough 1770 Inaugural Dissertation, “On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World” (aka “The Inaugural Dissertation”)—he discovered and formulated the revolutionary three-part *transcendentally idealistic* real-metaphysical doctrine that (i) all the proper objects of a rational but also specifically *human* capacity for cognition are only manifestly real, veridically apparent, or phenomenal objects of the human senses—namely, “appearances” (*Erscheinungen*)—and never non-manifest, Really Real, non-apparent, essentially non-relational or monad-like, *noumenal* objects—namely, “things-in-themselves” (*Dinge an sich*), (ii) the ontic structures of manifestly real, veridically apparent, or phenomenal physical spacetime *necessarily conform to* the innate and non-empirical mentalistic structure of the rational human cognitive capacity for sensory intuition, and (iii) the ontic structures of all manifestly real, veridically apparent, or phenomenal natural objects and states-of-affairs, together with all the causal-dynamic relations between manifest, apparent, or phenomenal natural objects and states-of-affairs also *necessarily conform to* the innate and non-empirical mentalistic structure of the rational human cognitive capacities for conceptualization, judgment, understanding or thought, and logical reasoning.

I'll call thesis (i) **The Cognitive Idealism Thesis**, and I'll call the conjunction of theses (ii) and (iii), **The Conformity Thesis**. It's crucial to note that **The Cognitive Idealism Thesis** is substantively different from both Berkeley's *metaphysical or dogmatic idealism thesis*, which says that (i) matter is impossible, and (ii) necessarily, everything is either (iia) an idea in a conscious mind or (iib) a conscious mind, and also from Descartes's *skeptical or problematic idealism thesis*, which says that (iii) possibly nothing exists outside my own conscious states. In sharp contrast to Berkeley's metaphysical or dogmatic idealism, then, (i) Kant's cognitive idealism does *not* apply to *all* objects whatsoever, (ii) Kant's cognitive idealism does *not* say that matter is impossible, and (iii) Kant's cognitive idealism does *not* say that all the proper objects of all human cognition are nothing but merely subjective ideas, that is, objects existing merely in "inner sense." Correspondingly, in sharp contrast to Descartes's skeptical or problematic idealism, Kant's cognitive idealism does *not* imply that it's possible that nothing exists outside my conscious states, namely, my inner sense. Sharply on the contrary to Berkeleyan and Cartesian idealism alike, as the B edition's "Refutation of Idealism" makes fully explicit, Kant's cognitive idealism in fact implies that, assuming the fact of my self-consciousness of my own conscious states, namely, of the contents of my own inner sense, then necessarily, something really and truly exists outside my conscious states in space.

Now, what does Kant mean by "appearances" or *Erscheinungen*? In her 1947 novel, *Manservant and Maidervant*, Ivy Compton-Burnett makes an extremely profound observation about the concept of *appearances*:

Appearances are not held to be a clue to the truth. But we seem to have no other.
(Compton-Burnett, 1947: p. 5)

As I read Compton-Burnett, she's saying three philosophically important things: (i) that the concept of *appearances* is ambiguous, (ii) that according to the first or "falsidical" concept of appearances, the very idea of "an appearance" means *a mere seeming*, which is consistent with *falsity* and *illusion*, and (iii) that according to the second or "veridical" concept of appearances, the very idea of an appearance means that we have no clue to the truth about reality *except* appearances and that appearances in this sense simply *are* the objective truth about *manifest reality*.

More precisely, according to the second or "veridical" concept of appearances, the very idea of an appearance means that things appear to be a certain way, *precisely because they really and truly are that way*. For example, if I'm Sherlock Holmes and have just solved a very subtle case and I say by way of conclusion, "it appears that Professor Moriarity is the culprit," then *Professor Moriarity manifestly really and truly is the culprit*. But even less dramatically, generally speaking, necessarily, under ordinary circumstances, if Tom or

Dick or Mary appears at the door, *then Tom or Dick or Mary manifestly really and truly is at the door*. Appearances that fall under this second or “veridical” concept of appearances are therefore what I call *veridical appearances*. In ordinary German, the term that corresponds to the first or “falsidical” concept of appearances is *Schein*. Correspondingly, then, Kant’s term *Erscheinungen* is a philosophical technical term that means *veridical appearances*. For Kant, veridical appearances reveal the *empirically real* or *manifestly real* world to rational human cognizers. Therefore, Kant’s transcendental idealism is also an *empirical realism* or a *manifest realism*:

[The] empirical realist grants to matter, as appearance, a reality which need not be inferred, but is immediately perceived (*unmittelbar wahrgenommen*). (CPR A371)

Every outer perception ... immediately proves (*beweiset unmittelbar*) something real in space, or rather [what is represented through outer perception] is itself the real; to that extent, empirical realism is beyond doubt, i.e., to our outer intuitions (*Anschauungen*) there corresponds something real in space. (CPR A375)

Granting all that as philosophical backdrop, then what would justify Kant’s asserting **The Idealism Thesis** and **The Conformity Thesis**, that is, what would justify his asserting the truth of transcendental idealism? I think we can, rationally charitably and plausibly, philosophically reconstruct his basic argument for transcendental idealism in the following eight-step way.

First, let’s suppose, as initial assumptions, (i) the minimal Empiricist assumption that all human cognition begins in causally-triggered sense-experience, (ii) the minimal Rationalist assumption that we rational human animals actually cognitively possess some non-empirical or a priori mental representations, and *also* (iii) that we have authentic non-empirical or a priori knowledge of at least *some* objectively necessary truths, for example, in logic, mathematics, and metaphysics. And for expository convenience, let’s call all non-empirical or a priori mental representations, including a priori beliefs and a priori knowledge, “a priori cognitions.”

Second, what then rules out the skeptical possibility that the correspondence between the abstract, non-empirical objects and truth-making states-of-affairs on the one hand, and our a priori cognitions on the other, is nothing but a massive coincidence?

Third, if it *is* a massive coincidence, then the correspondence between our a priori cognitions and their abstract, non-empirical objects or truth-making states-of-affairs is merely *accidental* or *contingent*, and could just as easily have *failed* to obtain. Again for

expository convenience, let's call this deep skeptical worry *The Problem of Cognitive-Semantic Luck*.

Fourth, one possible solution to The Problem of Cognitive-Semantic Luck is that the abstract, non-empirical objects and states-of-affairs *naturally cause* our a priori cognitions. That's the *classical Empiricist* or Lockean-Humean solution.

Fifth, the basic problem with the classical Empiricist solution, however, is that it's doubly incompatible with the initial assumption that the cognitions caused by object and states of affairs are non-empirical or a priori, both in the sense that all cognitions that are manifestly really naturally caused must be empirical or a posteriori, and also in the sense that abstract, non-empirical objects and states-of-affairs, which do *not* exist as embedded inside spacetime, cannot enter into manifestly real natural causal relations with human cognizers, who *do* exist as embedded inside spacetime. In this respect, Kant's recognition of The Problem of Cognitive-Semantic Luck is a substantive anticipation of what 20th and 21st century epistemologists and philosophers of mathematics and logic call "Benacerraf's Dilemma" (Benacerraf, 1973; see also Hanna, 2015: chs. 6-8).

Sixth, another pair of possible solutions to The Problem of Cognitive-Semantic Luck are that an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good or non-deceiving God creates either (i) a direct non-causal cognitive relation of *acquaintance* (*kennen*), or (ii) an indirect non-relational *pre-established harmony*, between the abstract, non-empirical referents and truth-makers of a priori cognitions on the one hand, and those a priori cognitions on the other. Those, respectively, are the *Cartesian* and *Leibnizian* solutions.

Seventh, given the fact that all the proper objects of a rational but also specifically human capacity for cognition are phenomena or manifestly real natural objects, and never noumena or things-in-themselves, then the appeal to a non-deceiving God and to God's creation of humanly-inaccessible mysterious cognitive acquaintance relations or equally mysterious pre-established harmonies seems no better justified—in effect, no more than an arbitrary and question-begging appeal to a *deus ex machina*—than the skeptical hypothesis that the correspondence is nothing but a massive coincidence. Indeed, in the light of the implausibility of the Cartesian and Leibnizian *deus ex machina*-style solutions, what could decisively rule out the further skeptical possibility that the correspondence is *simply illusory* and has been created by an Evil Demon, namely, by a God-like being who *is* a deceiver?

Eighth, and finally, in view of the failures of the classical Empiricist, Cartesian, and Leibnizian solutions to The Problem of Cognitive-Semantic Luck, and assuming that these three possible solutions exhaust the logical space of all the most promising and

relevant solutions to The Problem, then we can infer the truth of transcendental idealism, by philosophical abduction, aka transcendental proof, as the only adequate solution.

In his famous letter to Marcus Herz of 21 February 1772, and then again 15 years later in the B edition of the CPR, Kant formulates this basic argument for transcendental idealism in the following ways:

As I thought through the theoretical part [of “The Limits of Sense and Reason”], considering its whole scope and the reciprocal relations of its parts, I noticed that I still lacked something essential, something that in my long metaphysical studies I, as well as others, had failed to pay attention to and that, in fact, constitutes the key to the whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics. I asked myself: What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call “representation” to the object? If a representation is only a way in which the subject is affected by the object, then it is easy to see how the representation is in conformity with this object, namely as an effect in accord with its cause, and it is easy to see this modification of our mind can *represent* something, that is, have an object. Thus the passive or sensuous representations have an understandable relationship to objects, and the principles that are derived from the nature of our soul have an understandable validity for all things insofar as those things are supposed to be objects of the senses. In the same way, if that in us which we call “representation” were active with regard to the object, that is, if the object were created by the representation (as when divine cognitions are conceived as the archetypes of all things), the conformity of these representations to their objects could be understood. Thus the possibility of both an *intellectus archetypi* (on whose intuitions the things themselves would be grounded) and an *intellectus ectypi* (which would derive the data for its logical procedure from the sensible intuition of things) is at least intelligible. However, our understanding, through its representations, is not the cause of the object nor is the object the cause of the intellectual representations in the mind.... Therefore the pure concepts of the understanding must not be abstracted from sense perceptions, nor must they express the reception of representations through the senses; but though they must have their origin in the nature of the soul, they are neither caused by the object nor bring the object into being. In my dissertation I was content to explain the nature of intellectual representations in a merely negative way, namely, to state that they were not modifications of the soul brought about by the object. However I silently passed over the further question of how a representation that refers to the object without being in any way affected by it can be possible. I had said: The sensuous representations present things as they appear, the intellectual representations present them as they are. But by what means are these things given to us, if not by the way in which they affect us? And if such intellectual representations depend on our inner activity, whence comes the agreement that that they are supposed to have with objects—objects that are nevertheless not possibly produced thereby? And the axioms of pure reason concerning these objects—how do they agree with these objects, since the agreement has not been reached with the aid of experience? In mathematics this is possible, because the objects before us are quantities and can be

represented as quantities only because it is possible for us to produce their mathematical representations (by taking numerical units a given number of times). But in the case of relationships involving qualities—as to how my understanding may form for itself concepts of things completely *a priori*, with which concepts the things must necessarily agree, and as to how my understanding may formulate *real* principles concerning the possibility of such concepts, with which principles experience must be in exact agreement, and which nevertheless are independent of experience—this question, of how the faculty of understanding achieves this conformity with the things themselves, is still left in a state of obscurity. Plato assumed a previous intuition of divinity as the primary source of the pure concepts of the understanding and of first principles. [Malebranche] believed in a still-continuing perennial intuition of this primary being. Various moralists have accepted precisely this view with respect to basic moral laws. Crusius believed in certain implanted rules for the purpose of forming judgments and ready-made concepts that God implanted in the human soul just as they had to be in order to harmonize with things. Of these systems, one may call the former the *influxum hyperphysicum* and the latter the *harmonium preabilitatem intellectualem*. But the *deus ex machina* is the greatest absurdity one could hit on in the determination of the origin and validity of our knowledge. It has—beside its deceptive circle in the conclusion concerning our cognitions—also this additional disadvantage: it encourages all sorts of wild notions and every pious and speculative brainstorm. (C 10: 129-135 [21 Feb. 1772], italics in the original)

Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the object must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us.... If intuition has to conform to the [physical] constitution of the objects, then I do not see how we can know anything of them *a priori*; but if the object (as an object of the senses) conforms to the [mentalist] constitution of our faculty of intuition (*Anschauungsvermögens*), then I can very well represent the possibility to myself. (CPR Bxvi-xvii, italics in the original)

Now there are only two ways in which a **necessary** agreement of experience with the concepts of its objects can be thought: either the experience makes these concepts possible, or these concepts make the experience possible. The first is not the case with the categories (nor with pure sensible intuition); for they are *a priori* concepts, hence independent of experience (the assertion of an empirical origin would be a sort of *generatio aequivoca*). Consequently only the second way remains (as it were a system of the **epigenesis** of pure reason): namely, that the categories contain the grounds of the possibility of all experience in general from the side of the understanding.... If someone still wanted to propose a middle way between the only two, already named ways, namely, that the categories were neither **self-thought** *a priori* first principles of our cognition, nor drawn from experience,

but were rather subjective predispositions of our thinking, implanted in us along with our existence by our author in such a way that their use would agree exactly with the laws of nature along which experience runs (a kind of **preformation-system** of pure reason), then (besides the fact that on such a hypothesis no end can be seen to how far one might drive the presupposition of predetermined predispositions for future judgments) this would be decisive against the supposed middle way: that in such a case the categories would lack the **necessity** that is essential to their concept. For, for example, the concept of cause, which asserts the necessity of a consequent under a presupposed condition, would be false if it rested only on a subjective necessity, arbitrarily implanted in us, of combining certain empirical representations according to a rule of relation. I would not be able to say that the effect is combined with the cause in the object (i.e., necessarily), but only that I am so constituted that I cannot think of this representation otherwise than as so connected; which is precisely what the skeptic wishes most, for then all our insight through the supposed objective validity of our judgments is nothing but sheer illusion, and there would be no shortage of people who would not concede this subjective necessity (which must be felt) on their own; at least one would not be able to quarrel with anyone about that which merely depends on the way in which his subject is organized. (*CPR B166-168, italics and boldfacing in the original*)

Unfortunately, the positive formulation of transcendental idealism at *CPR Bxvii* is not itself *perfectly* clear and distinct, to put it mildly, and could, at least in principle, express any one of the four following versions of **The Conformity Thesis**, where the options run from the strongest formulation to the weakest: (i) there is a physical-to-mental *identity relation* between the ontic structures of veridically apparent, phenomenal, or manifestly real physical spacetime, together with the causal-dynamic relations between veridically apparent, phenomenal, or manifestly real natural objects and natural states-of-affairs on the one hand, and the innate mentalistic structures of rational human sensibility, understanding, and reason on the other, or (ii) there is a mental-to-physical *logical-supervenience-without-identity relation* between the innate mentalistic structures of rational human sensibility, understanding, and reason on the one hand, and the ontic structures of veridically apparent, phenomenal, or manifestly real natural spacetime together with the causal-dynamic relations between veridically apparent, phenomenal, or manifestly real natural objects and natural states-of-affairs on the other, or (iii) there is a mental-to-physical *isomorphism-without-either-identity-or-logical-supervenience relation* between the innate mentalistic structures of rational human sensibility, understanding, and reason on the one hand, and the ontic structures of veridically apparent, phenomenal, or manifestly real natural spacetime together with the causal-dynamic relations between veridically apparent, phenomenal, or manifestly real natural objects and natural states-of-affairs on the other.

Or most weakly of all: (iv) there is a physical-to-mental *strong modal actualist counterfactual dependency relation* between the innate mentalistic structures of rational human sensibility, understanding, and reason on the one hand, and the ontic structures of veridically apparent, phenomenal, or manifestly real natural spacetime together with the causal-dynamic relations between veridically apparent, phenomenal, or manifestly real natural objects and natural states-of-affairs on the other, such that, necessarily, if the manifestly real natural world actually exists, then if rational human cognizers *were* also to exist, then they *would* be able to know the ontic structures of manifestly real natural spacetime directly through non-empirical intuition, and also *would* be able to know the causal-dynamic relations between manifestly real natural objects and natural states-of-affairs indirectly through concepts, judgments, and inferences. My own view is that *the most philosophically defensible version of The Conformity Thesis* is the conjunction of (iii) and (iv), which I call *weak or counterfactual transcendental idealism*.

In turn, it should especially be noted, according to weak or counterfactual transcendental idealism, anything X can be weakly or counterfactually transcendently ideal or mind-dependent *even if, and whenever*, no rational human minds actually *do* exist. It has only to be necessarily true of X that *were* rational human minds to exist, then they *would* be able to know some fundamental structural things about X. Or in other words, the weak or counterfactual mind-dependence of X is just that it is *necessarily really possible for X to be knowable at least partially by minds like ours*, were such minds to exist. But that can be true even if minds like ours *do not actually exist*, or *indeed have never actually existed*. In that way, it is perfectly really possible for *the Big Bang* to be weakly or counterfactually transcendently ideal, without postulating either our metaphysically mysterious presence at the Big Bang or our anti-realistic retrospective “cognitive construction” of the Big Bang. Indeed, I think that weak or counterfactual transcendental idealism is necessarily equivalent to a *moderate* version of the famous or notorious *Anthropic Principle* in recent and contemporary physics, and also that contemporary physics is *explanatorily incomplete* without it (Hanna, 2022, 2024b: ch. 7).

In the *Prolegomena* Kant says that “life is the subjective condition of all our possible experience” (*Prol* 4: 335), and in the third *Critique*, he says that “mind for itself is entirely life (the principle of life itself)” (*CPJ* 5: 278). And according to Kant in the first *Critique* and in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, matter is essentially a nomologically-governed totality of dynamic attractive and repulsive forces. Moreover, in the unfinished *Transition from the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science to Physics* project contained in the *Opus postumum*, he argues in the so-called “Aether Deduction” that an a priori *material* condition of the possibility of experience is an actual and manifestly real material correlate of the supersensible substrate, namely, the universal dynamic aether, as the unified totality of attractive and repulsive forces, as the dual causal

source of inert matter (natural mechanisms) and also natural purposes (living organisms) alike (*OP* 21: 206-233). Kant's universal dynamic aether is, in effect, what we would now call "fields of force" or "energy flows." Indeed, viewed retrospectively, with 20-20 philosophical hindsight, it's clear that Kant's dynamic aether theory is fully compatible with contemporary quantum field theory, *modulo* the standard competing interpretations of the quantum phenomena and quantum mechanics.

Therefore, Kant believes that (i) mind and life are *metaphysically continuous with one another* (**The Strong Continuity of Mind and Life Thesis**), (ii) life and the universal dynamic aether (aka energy) are also *metaphysically continuous with one another* (**The Strong Continuity of Life and Energy Thesis**), and (iii) because mind and life are metaphysically continuous with the universal dynamic aether or energy, therefore mind and life are both *objectively real, causally efficacious natural facts* (**The Causal Efficacy of Mind and Life Thesis**).²

Kant's transcendental idealism, as we have seen, postulates an ontological dependency and asymmetric necessary conformity between the structures and relations of the veridically apparent, phenomenal, or manifestly real natural world on the one hand, and certain non-reducible, non-empirical structural properties of the rational human mind on the other. But transcendental idealism must *also* be understood to contain the *further* three-part ontological thesis formulated just above, to the effect that mind and life are metaphysically continuous and that both of them are actually immanent in the causally efficacious complex thermodynamics of material nature, namely, energy flows.

Throughout his philosophical career, Kant was deeply interested in the metaphysics of physics, and also strongly committed to the thesis that there's an irreducible explanatory and ontological difference—that is, a non-identity and a non-supervenience—between mechanical (aka "dead") causal-dynamic forces and non-mechanical (aka "living") causal-dynamic forces (see, e.g., Mensch, 2013; Hanna, 2014). This can be clearly seen in his earliest published work in 1747, "Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces," in the period between the A and B editions of CPR, in the 1786 *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, and again in his final, unfinished work from the late 1790s, *Transition from the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science to Physics*, the drafts and notes for which are collected in the *Opus postumum*. For the Critical and post-Critical Kant, all *matter known or knowable by a Newtonian mechanistic physics* is inert,

² In the 21st century, these three theses have finally returned to the philosophical scene: see, e.g., (Thompson, 2007; Hanna and Maiese, 2009; Kirchoff and Froese, 2017; Torday, Miller Jr, and Hanna, 2020; Kauffman and Roli, 2023; and Hanna, 2024b).

and also ontically constituted by the interplay of attractive and repulsive “dead” or mechanical forces.

But during the post-Critical period Kant holds that some manifestly real natural processes, namely, *all and only those that are unknowable by a Newtonian deterministic, mechanistic physics*, are also non-inert, and ontically constituted by “living” or non-mechanical forces. These two theses are logically and metaphysically compatible precisely because all material or physical properties for Kant are intrinsic relational properties of veridical appearances, phenomena, or manifestly real objects and *not* intrinsic non-relational properties of Really Real objects, things-in-themselves, or noumena. Amongst the manifestly real non-mechanical processes are *organismic* processes, and amongst the organismic processes are *mental* processes. Again, just as for Kant the explanatory and ontological difference between mechanical and organismic processes is intrinsically relational or immanently structural, and not intrinsic non-relational, so too for him the explanatory and ontological difference between organismic and mental processes is intrinsically relational or immanently structural, not intrinsic non-relational.

Hence the post-Critical Kant is neither a *mechanist-materialist* who thinks that physical matter is dead or inert *in itself*, nor a *hylozoist*, who thinks that physical matter itself is alive or vital *in itself*, nor is he a *substance dualist* or *property dualist*, who thinks that the mind or mental properties are something *in themselves*, over and above organismic or any other natural processes. For Kant, some kinds of physical matter are indeed *relatively* inert and *relatively* mechanical, in the sense that (as we would now say) they’re necessarily determined by the Conservation Laws, including the 1st Law of Thermodynamics, the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics, and Turing-computable algorithms, relative to all the settled quantity-of-energy facts about the past. But there’s *no intrinsic non-relational difference*, on the one hand, between physical matter, as constituted by the universal dynamic aether, and living organisms, just as there’s *no intrinsic non-relational difference*, on the other hand, between non-minded living organisms and minded living organisms. The natural science of biology studies the non-inert, *organismic* complex thermodynamic processes, whereas the natural science of chemistry studies *all the non-inert complex thermodynamic processes per se, whether organic or inorganic*. And the natural (and for Kant, also anthropological-pragmatic) science of empirical psychology studies *all the organismic conscious or mental processes*. Precisely how correctly to characterize the epistemic and explanatory status of biology, chemistry, and empirical psychology, and precisely how correctly to relate them to one another and also to physics and mathematics, was a source of deep and lifelong philosophical concern and puzzlement to Kant (see, e.g., *MFNS* 4: 468-472, and *CPJ* 5: 373-375, and 400).

Back now, finally, to Kant's dogmatic slumbering and his awakening from it by means of remembering Hume, originally admitted by him in 1783. In a much later 1798 letter to Christian Garve, the post-Critical Kant *also* claims that it was "the antinomy of pure reason" that awoke him from his dogmatic slumber:

It was not the investigation of the existence of God, immortality, and so on, but rather the antinomy of pure reason that ... awoke me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason itself, in order to resolve the scandal of ostensible contradiction with itself (C 12: 257-258 [21 Sept. 1798]).

What Kant wrote to Garve in 1798 may seem, initially, at odds with what he said in 1783 about Hume's wake-up call and in the *Reflexionen* about his philosophical breakthrough in the year 1769, in part because it's then natural to think that Kant's awakening from his Leibnizian and Wolffian dreams actually originally occurred in his 1766 essay *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*. And of course that chronology fits the "dogmatic-slumber-filled-with-classical-Rationalist-metaphysical-dreams-followed-by-Humean-Critical awakening" metaphor to a T. Nevertheless, on further reflection, we can see that the 1798 remark is in fact perfectly consistent with his earlier claim in 1783 that it was Hume's skeptical Empiricism about content, truth, and justification of human cognition, especially as applied to the classical Rationalist metaphysical concept of causation and causal necessity, *when taken together with* Kant's own transcendental idealism circa 1768-1772 about the necessary conformity of the ontic structures of manifestly real spacetime and the causal-dynamic relations between manifestly real natural objects and states-of-affairs, to the innate mentalistic structures of human sensibility, understanding, and inferential reason, that initiated the Critical Philosophy. This is because the antinomy of pure reason, as discovered in 1766, *also* showed him the self-annihilating character of classical metaphysical and especially classical Rationalist metaphysical reasoning, and thereby the possibility of the critique of pure reason. So in fact, Kant was awakened and correspondingly enlightened *three times* during his immensely philosophically creative six-year period from 1766-1772.

Therefore his revolutionary anthropocentric turn to the mitigated rationalism or real metaphysics of transcendental idealism in fact has *three* conjoined and equally important philosophical sources: **first**, the self-annihilating character of all classical metaphysical reasoning, especially classical Rationalist metaphysical reasoning, demonstrated by the antinomy of pure reason, and thereby the possibility of the critique of pure reason, discovered by Kant in 1766, **second**, Hume's skeptical Empiricism about the content, truth, and justification of human cognition, especially as applied to the classical Rationalist metaphysical concepts of causation and causal necessity, remembered by Kant in 1771 or 1772, and **third**, Kant's own revolutionary thesis in real

metaphysics, i.e., transcendental idealism, about the necessary conformity of the ontic structures of veridically apparent, phenomenal, or manifestly real natural spacetime and the causal-dynamic relations between manifestly real natural objects and states-of-affairs, to the innate mentalistic structures of human sensibility, understanding, and inferential reason, discovered and formulated by him between the “Directions in Space” essay in 1768 (see also Hanna, 2016) and “the year of great light,” 1769, and 1772, the year of Kant’s famous letter to Herz.

These three sources combined to produce in Kant—a middle-aged, mid-career, and middling-successful academic philosopher who was 42 in 1766 and 48 in 1772, a smallish (5 feet 2 inches tall) confirmed bachelor with mild *angina pectoris*, aka “chest pains,” and a hypochondriac—a personal intellectual and spiritual rebirth comparable to those of Augustine, Luther, and Pascal (Kuehn, 2001: chs. 4-6, esp. pp. 148-154 and 238). But unlike the earlier thinkers, Kant’s personal rebirth was *not* caused by discovering or re-discovering *God*: on the contrary, it was brought about by discovering or re-discovering *the rational human condition*:

If there is any science humankind really needs, it is the one I teach, of how to occupy properly that place in [the world] that is assigned to humankind, and how to learn from it what one must be in order to be human. (*Rem 20*: 45)

This humanistic discovery or re-discovery, in turn, was triggered, circa 1764, by reading Rousseau:

Rousseau brought me around.... I learned to honor human beings and I would think myself less useful than the common worker if I did not believe that this consideration of everything else could have worth in establishing the rights of humankind. (*Rem 20*: 44)

This *Rousseauian revolution* initiated the process of thinking that eventually led to Kant’s radical Critical and post-Critical conception of human *dignity* or *worth* (*Würde*) (see, e.g., *GMM* 4: 434-435): the absolute, non-denumerably infinite, intrinsic, objective value or worth of human *persons* (Hanna, 2023). Indeed, it’s plausible to think that just as re-reading Hume woke Kant from his *dogmatic Leibnizian-Wolffian slumbers* about metaphysics and epistemology, so too reading Rousseau woke Kant from his *dogmatic Hobbesian pessimist slumbers* about humanity and morality (Hanna, 2017). Moreover, just as Hume’s wake-up call didn’t convert Kant to Hume’s *classical Empiricism*, but instead led to Kant’s brilliantly unique doctrine of transcendental idealism, so too Rousseau’s wake-up call didn’t convert Kant to Rousseau’s unrealistic optimism about human nature, but instead led to Kant’s brilliantly unique doctrine of *realistically optimist dignitarian humanism* (Hanna, 2023, 2024c).

So my answer to the question, on what rational grounds can Kantianism justify its claim to be the ultimate form of Western philosophy?, which is also understood to be equivalent to the question, what is Kant's Critical philosophy and how can it be rationally justified?, is this. The essence of Kant's Critical and post-Critical philosophy is a three-part doctrine consisting of (i) weak or counterfactual transcendental idealism, together with empirical or manifest realism, (ii) anti-mechanism or organicism, and (iii) realistically optimist dignitarian humanism. In my opinion, all of these doctrines are true, and in turn, their conjunction jointly constitutes the ultimate form of Western philosophy. From here on in, then, we can endlessly refine Kantianism in this triadic sense, and endlessly argue against its anti-Kantian challengers, but we can never rationally reject or transcend it.³

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- C *Immanuel Kant: Correspondence, 1759-99*. Trans. A. Zweig. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999.
- CPJ *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Trans. P. Guyer and E. Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000. (1790, Ak 5: 165-485)
- CPR *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. P. Guyer and A. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997. (1781 or A edition: Ak 4: 1-251; 1787 or B edition: Ak 3)
- MFNS *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. Trans. M. Friedman. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004. (1786, Ak 4: 465-565)
- OP *Immanuel Kant: Opus postumum*. Trans. E. Förster and M. Rosen. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993. (1796-1803, Ak 21-22)
- Prol *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Trans. G. Hatfield. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004. (1783, Ak 4: 253-383)
- R *Reflections, aka Reflexionen* (n.d., Ak 14-23)
- Rem "Remarks on the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime." Trans. M. Cooley and P. Frierson. Available online at URL = http://people.whitman.edu/~frierspr/kants_bemerkungen1.htm>. (circa 1764, Ak 20)

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