

“Other than Omniscient: An Interpretation and Defense of Kant’s Rejection of Aristotle’s Notion of Finite Reasoning”

BY

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## Table of Contents

Title Page.....	I
Acceptance Page.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Dissertation Abstract.....	v
Project Introduction.....	vi
Chapter Contributions.....	xi
 <b>Part One: Aristotle’s Doctrine of Finite Reasoning (or, The Meaning of Aristotle’s Divinity Thesis)</b>	
 Chapter One: “A Divine Life”	
Chapter Summary/Goals.....	2
A. The Difficulty of the Divinity Thesis.....	3
B. The Two Excellences.....	4
C. Two Excellences, Two Lives.....	8
D. The Problem with Incompatibilism.....	12
E. Beasts, Humans, Gods: Life Inside and Outside the Polis.....	16
 Chapter Two: “Aristotle on the Human Intellect”	
Chapter Summary/Goals.....	25
A. Introduction.....	26
B. Laying the Groundwork: Observations About Νοῦς as a Substance.....	27
C. An Account of Τὸ Νοεῖν.....	31
D. An Account of Τὸ Θεωρεῖν.....	36
E. The Non-Identity of Τὸ Διανοεῖσθαι and Τὸ Θεωρεῖν.....	38
F. The Non-Identity of Τὸ Διανοεῖσθαι and Το Νοεῖν.....	41
G. The Mind Insofar as It Makes.....	43
H. Traditional Translations, Traditional Problems, New Solutions.....	46
I. The Life of Contemplation.....	49
 Chapter Three: “The Nature of Divine Contemplation”	
Chapter Summary/Goals.....	52
A. Introduction.....	53
B. The Meaning of the Self-Contemplation Model.....	53
C. Traditional Arguments for the Self-Contemplation Model.....	56
D. Traditional Arguments for the Omniscience Model.....	58
E. Does Omniscience Compromise God’s Ontological Status as the HighestBeing?.....	61
F. Does Omniscience Contradict Immutability?.....	64
G. Conclusion.....	68
 <b>Part Two: Kant and Aristotle on Intuition</b>	
 Chapter Four: “The Origin of Kant’s Doctrine of Non-Omniscience”	
Chapter Summary/Goals.....	70
A. Introduction.....	71
B. The Empiricists and the <i>Quid Juris</i> Question.....	71
C. The Rationalists and the <i>Quid Juris</i> Question.....	75
D. Creative Intuition and the <i>Quid Juris</i> Question.....	82

E. Spontaneity, for the First Time.....	84
F. Kantian Finitude.....	86
<b>Chapter Five: “Kant and Aristotle in Dialogue”</b>	
Chapter Summary.....	91
A. Introduction.....	92
B. Kant’s <i>Intellectus Archetypus</i> .....	92
C. Aristotle and Kant’s Doctrine of Omniscience.....	94
D. The Importance of Intellectual Intuition.....	99
E. Conclusion.....	102
<b>Part Three: The Superiority of Kant’s Interpretation of Non-Omniscience</b>	
<b>Chapter Six: “The Meaning and Attempted Justification of Kant’s Doctrine of Legitimate Judgments”</b>	
Chapter Summary.....	105
A. Introduction.....	106
B. That Extra-Intuitive Judgments Must Be Conditioning Judgments.....	107
C. The Conditioning Judgments Must Not Be of the Unconditioned.....	114
D. Should We Believe Kant’s Doctrine of Legitimate Judgments?.....	117
<b>Chapter Seven: “The Antinomial Attack on Metaphysics”</b>	
Chapter Summary.....	124
A. The Role of the Transcendental Dialectic.....	125
B. The Aesthetic Attack on Metaphysics in the First <i>Critique</i> .....	126
C. The Logic of a Dialectic Argument.....	129
D. Antinomial Arguments as Dialectical Conflicts.....	131
E. Antinomial Arguments as Apagogical Arguments.....	133
F. Antinomial Arguments as Arguments Rooted in Experience.....	134
G. The Antinomial Attack on Metaphysics on the Third <i>Critique</i> .....	136
H. Does the Antinomial Argument Present a Problem for Aristotle?.....	139
I. Is the Antinomial Argument Successful as a Defense of Transcendental Idealism?.....	141
J. A Return to the <i>Intellectus Archetypus</i> .....	143
K. Conclusion: Two Theories of Non-Omniscience.....	146
Bibliography.....	148

## Dissertation Abstract

Although actual human omniscience is unimaginable, it is not obvious what it means to be limited with regard to thought. One of Kant's significant contributions to epistemology was his redefinition of the limits of thought. He is explicit about this when he contrasts human, receptive intuition, and the creative intuition that an infinite being would have. Importantly, judging and reasoning are only necessary for a mind that is first affected by an object through sensibility, which is not the case for a being with creative intuition, since this kind of intuition creates its own object. This means that the intellect of Kant's God is distinct from the human intellect in kind, since judging and reasoning are essentially finite (or what I will call 'non-omniscient') activities; they are already evidence of a finite, human cognition.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Aristotle argues that human cognition - beyond its capacity for discursivity - is able to contemplate; as we will see, Aristotle argues that contemplation is divine, and so a limited intellect can become more or less like an omniscient intellect depending on the quality of one's contemplative life. In this work, I want to 1) establish that Kant and Aristotle have incompatible conceptions of non-omniscience, 2) trace the epistemological commitments that motivate their rival positions on non-omniscience, 3) show that their particular views on the legitimacy of metaphysical judgments presuppose their particular interpretations of non-omniscience, and 4) argue that Kant provides a superior analysis of non-omniscience.

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<sup>1</sup> For reasons that will become clear in Chapter 5.D, it is important that judging and reasoning are the only ways for human cognition to be active.

## Project Introduction

The West has a long tradition of associating human reason and divinity. Plato's Socrates recommended that "...we should make all speed to take flight from this world to the other, and that means becoming like the divine so far as we can, and that again is to become righteous with the help of wisdom" (*Th* 176b).<sup>2</sup> Aristotle believed that "the intellect is divine," and so "the life in accordance with it is divine" (*NE* 1177b30-1).<sup>3</sup> Two millennia did not change the intellectual culture much, for Spinoza expresses a similar sentiment: "[i]t is in the nature of reason to regard things as necessary... But this necessity is the very necessity of God's eternal nature. Therefore it is in the nature of reason to regard things in this light of eternity" (*Ethics* II.44).<sup>4</sup> They were of course not trying to say that human intellect might become similar to a divine intellect, but that divine cognition operates as an ideal for human cognition. It makes no difference that this goal is unattainable; what is important is that some are closer than others. This type of thinker would believe that I may become omniscient in the same way that I may run faster than the speed of sound. The inevitable failure to become omniscient is simply a way to express the condition of frail, human reason.

Although it is now out of fashion to be this theologically explicit, Henry Allison observes that this model of knowledge is possible without a belief in the existence of God because the knowledge that a hypothetical God would have can still be used as a measuring stick: "human knowledge is judged by the ideal standard of divine knowledge and found wanting" (22).<sup>5</sup>

Allison calls this the theocentric view of knowledge; this classification is reasonable because on

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<sup>2</sup> *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton University Press; Princeton, New Jersey, 1985 ed. *Theaetetus* translated by F.M. Cornford.

<sup>3</sup> *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Volume Two. Bollington Series LXXI.2; Princeton University Press. *Nicomachean Ethics* translated by W.D. Ross.

<sup>4</sup> Spinoza, Baruch. *The Ethics* (II, prop 44, Proof of Corollary II). Translated by Samuel Shirley. Hackett Publishing Company; Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1992 ed.

<sup>5</sup> Allison, Henry. (1983). *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 22.

this model, human knowledge is divine knowledge writ small; conversely, divine knowledge is human knowledge writ large. Allison points out that Kant interprets knowledge differently. Kant's alternative model becomes clear when he contrasts a human, receptive intuition with the creative intuition that an infinite being would have. Importantly, discursive reasoning (that is, thinking or judging) is only necessary for a mind that is first affected by an object through sensibility, which is not the case for a being with creative intuition, since this kind of intuition creates its own object. This means that the intellect of Kant's God is distinct from the human intellect in kind, since thinking is essentially a finite activity; thinking is already evidence of finitude. Thus, Allison calls Kant's model of knowledge 'anthropocentric.' For Kant, divine knowledge cannot even serve as an ideal to which human knowledge may aspire.

Aristotle, like Kant after him, considers the nature of divine mental activity and then compares and contrasts human thinking. He says in reference to contemplation - the highest form of mental activity - that "God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are" (*Meta* 1072b24).<sup>6</sup> Although it is quite controversial in the secondary literature, I want to establish that this *really* means what is *seems* to mean, namely that (some) humans literally have the capacity to engage in the same activity in which God does, if only for short periods of time and about fewer things. Aristotle means that human reason is divine, and so a human intellect can become more or less like an omniscient intellect depending on the quality of one's contemplative life.

Allison has labeled Kant's model of knowledge 'anthropocentric' and Aristotle's 'theocentric.' Since I am not interested in knowledge per se, but rather with the limits of knowledge compared with omniscience, I will characterize these models as competing interpretations of non-omniscience. Aristotle's model of non-omniscience may be called 'degree

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<sup>6</sup> *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Volume Two. Bollington Series LXXI.2; Princeton University Press, 1984, ed. *Metaphysics* translated by W.D. Ross.

non-omniscience,' since human reason differs from divine reason by degree. Kant's may be called 'kind non-omniscience,' since human and divine reason are different sorts of things.

Another way to characterize this difference is to note that Kant and Aristotle have different ways to answer this question: *As we acquire knowledge of the world, do we approach omniscience?*

The advantage of putting the matter this way suggests that their positions are contradictories and not contraries.

While I want to explore the epistemological presuppositions of these rival models of non-omniscience, my deeper interest concerns the human potential to make metaphysical judgments that result in knowledge.<sup>7</sup> I take up a version of a question that Kant first asked: why do we believe that we have a right to make metaphysical judgments?<sup>8</sup> There seems to be a great majority of philosophers, to say nothing of other academics and certainly non-academics, who believe in our *right* to metaphysics. An important word of warning: it is not the case that someone who believes in our right to metaphysical judgments will necessarily be optimistic about the possibility of metaphysical knowledge. It is consistent for someone both to believe that some metaphysical judgments are legitimate (that is, that we have a right to them) and also to be pessimistic that those judgments will ever be known, because for judgments to be known they must be justified. Consider a religious believer who believes that human reason will never be able to justify a metaphysical judgment. She may, however, believe that divine revelation imparts such judgments truly. So, for example, she could believe in free will because of a religious conviction, but believe that philosophical metaphysics will probably never justify this belief. This is an example of someone who believes that some metaphysical judgments are

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<sup>7</sup> Kant everywhere emphasizes that some metaphysical judgments are legitimate provided that they are pure postulates of moral reason (namely, God, the soul, and freedom). These, however, are practical metaphysical judgments that do not result in knowledge. Only the latter type are illegitimate.

<sup>8</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated and Edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. *The Cambridge Edition to the Works of Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason*. Cambridge University Press, 1998 ed., A84/B116



legitimate but is pessimistic about metaphysical knowledge. In what follows, I try to prove that it is Aristotle's and Kant's rival notions of non-omniscience that necessarily lead them to different positions on the legitimacy of metaphysical judgments.

Following Allison, I believe that Kant presents the most explicit and compelling argument for kind non-omniscience, and so my decision to allow Kant to represent this position is understandable. Although there are no shortage of rivals in the history of philosophy to Kant in this respect, I have chosen Aristotle in particular because his position is easily compared and contrasted with Kant's for several reasons (some of which I will have to argue): 1) they both explicitly confront the question of non-omniscience; 2) they both posit an omniscient intellect and then discuss the manner in which the finite, human intellect is different; 3) they have relevantly similar conceptions of omniscience; 4) they in fact believe differently about philosophy's right to metaphysical judgments; and finally 5) Aristotle's epistemology presents a unique challenge that Kant did not fully comprehend, which means that it is will be necessary for me to rearrange Kant's classification of metaphysical arguments to show how even Aristotle is wrong about non-omniscience.

And there is a sixth reason that Kant and Aristotle prove to be such interesting opponents. Although most of the story I want to tell emphasizes the differences between these thinkers, it is interesting that their arguments unfold from similar yet uncommon places. First, Kant and Aristotle share the intuition that knowledge of the sensible world is not just possible, but ordinary; what is more, this should be obvious to anyone. Both thinkers indicate that their epistemological optimism and the disdain of skepticism that it entails were present even before they had identified and formulated an argument to refute the skeptic.<sup>9</sup> This, however, is quite

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<sup>9</sup> Kant characterized the Transcendental Deduction as the most difficult of all of his arguments to construct, which indicates that he knew what his goal was before he figured out how to argue for it. Aristotle appears to believe that

different from the famous foot-stomping of G.E. Moore, who insisted that the skeptic was wrong, and his justification for his claim was that people do in fact know many things. What Moore shares with Kant and Aristotle is the basic intuition that a good epistemologist must figure out what has gone so wrong with the skeptic's argument that he has managed to lose sight of the most astonishing epistemological truth of all: that we find ourselves with the kinds of minds that are able to investigate the world. But Moore does not offer any real evidence for his belief, while Kant and Aristotle both make the kind of arguments that, if sound, would refute a skeptic.

So in order to support their basic intuitions, Kant and Aristotle must give arguments to show that knowledge of the sensible world is possible. Here we find another important similarity in the way they carry out their task, for they were impressed by the same epistemological aporia concerning the possibility of experience (i.e. the acquisition of ideas). Both think of themselves as carving out a middle ground between the theory of innate ideas on the one hand, and the model of the mind as a blank slate on the other. Kant's version of this maneuver is better known (or rather, it is usually thought that this move is properly *Kantian*), but this is precisely how Aristotle characterizes the roots of his own insights in the *Posterior Analytics*:

[consider] whether the states are not present in us but come about in us, or whether they are present but escape notice. Well, if we have them, it is absurd; for it results that we have pieces of knowledge more precise than demonstration and yet escapes notice. But if we get them without having them earlier, how might we become familiar with them and learn them from no pre-existing knowledge? For that is impossible...It is evidently impossible, then, both for us to have them and for them to come about in us when we are ignorant and in no such state at all (99b24-b31).<sup>10</sup>

Aristotle, like Kant, stood against the orthodox thinking of his time that believed that empiricism and rationalism exhausted the possibilities of accounting for the origin of ideas. They found them

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the skeptic's position is simply an intellectual hurdle that must be overcome, rather than a serious possibility to be considered.

<sup>10</sup> *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Volume Two. Bollington Series LXXI.2; Princeton University Press. *Posterior Analytics* translated by Jonathan Barnes. 1984 ed.

both insufficient, and set out to chart their own course. With similar beginnings to their careers as epistemologists, it is no small wonder that they ended up defending contradictory positions on the nature of human non-omniscience and the possibility of metaphysics.

### **Chapter Contributions**

Kant's position on the nature of non-omniscience is relatively straightforward: human intuition is receptive, unlike God's intuition, which means that human cognition is essentially different from God's. Quite the opposite is true regarding the meaning of Aristotle's notion that the intellect is divine, henceforth called 'the divinity thesis;' thus, the goal of Part One is simply to understand the meaning of this thesis. Aristotle says that 'God is in that good state in which we are sometimes.' Could he mean this as it sounds? Is it possible that Aristotle actually believes that humans have a manner of thinking available to them that is identical to God's? There are at least three problems that threaten to undermine the very intelligibility of his account, although all of these problems arise from what I will argue are interpretive shortcomings. The first difficulty is that if the intellect is divine, how could it be expressed in the context of a human life? As I will argue, even Aristotle's most sympathetic commentators give interpretations of this human-yet-divine life of contemplation that render his account of it untenable.

Second, traditional scholarship has a misguided notion of Aristotle's analysis of the difference between the human capacities of intuition and discursive reasoning, which leads to a misunderstanding of his doctrine of human contemplation. What Aristotle means, I argue, is that contemplation *is* intuition and *not* discursive thinking, but intuition that is active and not receptive (and therefore passive) because it does not depend on being actualized by any form in the external world. Finally, Aristotle's notion of continuity between human and divine reasoning will be undermined if it turns out that God, when God contemplates, contemplates nothing but

God's own self. On the contrary, God's contemplation consists of active intuition of the forms of the world, which is the very same activity in which some humans sometimes participate. The resolutions of these problems constitute Chapters 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Taken together, these three chapters will clarify the meaning of Aristotle's divinity thesis, which will therefore also clarify his doctrine of finitude.

Part Two (Chapters 4 and 5) is given the task of showing why Kant and Aristotle have similar interpretations of omniscience but incompatible interpretations of non-omniscience. While it is true that there is little scholarly debate on what Kant's position on what the nature of human finitude actually is, an account of why he holds this position is not as common. In Chapter 4, I find that Kant's interpretation of non-omniscience depends on his unique understanding of spontaneity. For Kant, cognition is partly receptive and partly spontaneous, and therefore, any analysis of cognition must respect both capacities. Importantly, Kant finds that both the categories and the formal intuition are products of spontaneity. This feature of Kant's epistemology, as noted by Henry Allison, implies epistemic limits, since human cognition must have epistemic conditions. Furthermore, Allison points out that this commits Kant to a unique understanding of the limits of human knowledge – a position which I have named 'kind non-omniscience.'

The beginning of Chapter 5 consists of an analysis of Kant's *intellectus archetypus* (to match Aristotle's analysis of divine cognition, which constitutes Chapter 3), and a direct comparison of their two conceptions of divine omniscience. Here I argue that whatever differences between their conceptions of omniscience there may be, they both have in mind an intellect that has complete, active, intuitive understanding of the world. In the context of the discussion of intuitive understanding, I return to the topic of spontaneity at the end of Chapter 5;

in Chapter 4, I argued that Kant's notion of spontaneity is consequential for his understanding of the nature of non-omniscience. But this is potentially misleading, because discursivity is spontaneous in a certain respect; furthermore, as I have shown, Aristotle's notion of active intellectual intuition is spontaneous in the same measure. The important difference is that for Kant, spontaneity is *a priori*, while for Aristotle (and for the Western philosophical tradition generally), spontaneity is *a posteriori*; that is, cognition becomes active after objects are given to it. The reason for this difference, I argue in 5.D, is Kant's denial of passive intellectual intuition as a human faculty. The upshot is that when Kant talks about spontaneity, he always has in mind *a priori* spontaneity that necessitates that human cognition is constitutive of objects as they appear, as opposed to how they are in themselves. Therefore, Kant's position on the nature of non-omniscience may be traced back to a single, detrimental belief, namely, that intuition is never intellectual.

Part Two is not normative, since there, I merely explain which of Kant's epistemological commitments gave rise to his doctrine of non-omniscience, without passing judgment on whether those commitments are justified. Part Three (Chapters 6 and 7) is essentially different, as I consider there whether we should believe Kant when he says that intuition cannot be intellectual. Although it is not obvious, one way to evaluate Kant's position on the impossibility of intellectual intuition is to evaluate his doctrine of legitimate judgments, because if he is right about what concepts may *not* be employed in a legitimate judgment (i.e. conceptions of the thing in itself), this gives considerable weight to his position on intellectual intuition. Thus, Chapter 6 begins with an exposition of Kant's doctrine of legitimate judgments (DLJ). At the end of the chapter, I consider a potentially devastating rejoinder to Kant's position; it seems that Kant's DLJ depends on the idea that intellectual intuition is impossible because objects can only be

given to us through affection, and the only kind of affection is sensible affection. However, as Chapter 2 shows, Aristotle believes that objects are given to the intellect through affective intuition. It does not appear that Kant, at any point in his career, justifies his belief that intellectual intuition could never be affective; hence, his entire position seems to be dogmatic, for the DLJ first requires us to believe that intellectual intuition is impossible.

Chapter 7, however, redeems Kant's position on non-omniscience by showing that the "antinomies of pure reason" provide an independent (and thus non-dogmatic) justification for his position on non-omniscience. Here, the first premise of the argument is that *if* intellectual intuition is possible, *then* it is possible to know things as they are in themselves. However, when we presuppose that there is no difference between appearance and things in themselves, reason commits itself to antinomial judgments, which can be made compatible only by dropping the presupposition of transcendental realism. This means that we are obligated to accept Kant's doctrine of the impossibility of human intellectual intuition, and all that this doctrine implies, namely transcendental idealism, epistemic conditions, spontaneity, and Kant's unique doctrine of non-omniscience.

## Chapter One: A Divine Life

### Chapter Summary by Section

- A. *The Difficulty of the Divinity Thesis*. This chapter concerns the first of three potential difficulties in properly accepting Aristotle's divinity thesis (that the intellect is divine), namely the apparent incompatibility of theoretical rational activity and practical rational activity.
- B. *Two Excellences*. The origin of this problem is that Aristotle identifies two ways that humans can engage in excellent rational activity.
- C. *Two Excellences, Two Lives*. Against the compatibilists, I argue that a single human being cannot live lives oriented toward both theoretical and practical excellence. Thus, the two excellences require two separate lives.
- D. *The Problem with Incompatibilism*. Having shown that compatibilism can't work, I identify three incompatibilists: Cooper, Kraut and Lear. Cooper and Kraut are both forced to believe that Aristotle never meant to recommend the practical life, an idea that I find implausible. Lear is better here, but he ends up saying that practical excellence is recommended insofar as we are soul/body composites, and theoretical excellence is recommended insofar as we are mental beings. But in that case, Lear is forced to say that Aristotle was not really recommending the life of theoretical excellence to any actual person since any actual person is a composite.
- E. *Beasts, Humans, Gods: Life Inside and Outside the Polis*. Here I argue that the only way to resolve this conflict is to believe that Aristotle variously recommended the life of slavery, or of practical excellence, or of theoretical excellence based on whichever one of the three particular natures that a given person has. Some people flourish in the highest degree by being slaves, some flourish through ethical activity, and some flourish through philosophy. Thus, my version of incompatibilism avoids the awkward conclusions with which the other incompatibilists find themselves.

## A. The Difficulty of the Divinity Thesis

Jonathan Lear worries that it

is so hard for a modern reader to take seriously...Aristotle's claim that man has a divine element in him. If we think of man as that earthy, embodied animal we know so well, it is hard not to think that the bulk of the *Nicomachean Ethics* provides one of the great descriptions of all times of the life available to him. From this perspective, the end of the *Ethics* looks like an unworked-out appendage, perhaps (one hopes) tacked on by a witless editor (Lear 319).<sup>11</sup>

Lear is referring to book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle makes a shift in emphasis which is by all accounts difficult to predict. He has spent the preceding eight books affectionately describing the political life, which cultivates practical or ethical excellences, such as justice, courage, and generosity. Then with barely one page of warning Aristotle pronounces the happiness of this life as happiness "in a secondary degree" (*NE* 1178a7).<sup>12</sup> Happiness in the highest measure comes from leading the life according to the intellect.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Lear worries that it may seem that the *Nicomachean Ethics* "remains torn between two ideals, the ethical and the contemplative lives" (Lear 319).

There are two general ways to address this problem. The first may be called compatibilism, whose adherents believe that the two ideals are compatible because they are, according to Aristotle, properly manifest in the context of a single life. If the best life for humans in general is one that both contemplates and participates in the life of the polis, then human activity will be divine at times, and human at others. It is perhaps tempting to advance this interpretation. After all, it was Aristotle himself who taught us about moderation. Surely life

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<sup>11</sup> Lear, Jonathan. (1994) *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>12</sup> *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Volume Two. Bollington Series LXXI.2; Princeton University Press. *Nicomachean Ethics* translated by W.D. Ross

<sup>13</sup> I do not find any of the following phrases to be misleading translations of 'ὁ κατὰ τὸν νοῦν βίος': the life of contemplation, the contemplative life, the life according to the intellect, the life of intellectual excellence, the philosophical life, the life of the philosopher, the life according to the mind, etc. Therefore, I will use them interchangeably throughout this work, mostly for rhetorical purposes. In the same measure, I will use several renderings of 'the political life.'



would be immoderate if one contemplated all the time while neglecting ethical life entirely. But as I will show, Aristotle does not address moderation in the context of contemplation because it would have undermined his argument for happiness as the chief good. If contemplation, which is the activity of the mind,<sup>14</sup> is the chief happiness of the philosopher, then at best ethical action would merely be a derivative good. That is, any happiness derived from ethical action would be good only insofar as it furthered one's true goal of contemplation. If true, this would undermine any position that identifies the two ideals as part of a single life.

The other strategy, which is Lear's, can be labeled 'incompatibilism' because it is the view that two excellences can only be cultivated in two separate lives. The incompatibilist does not have the aforementioned problem of the compatibilist because it is not necessary to explain how a single person could have two final goods. However, this brings out perhaps a more awkward problem. If the life according to ethical excellence is happy in the second degree, then it does not seem that anyone should live this life unless it were somehow possible to wish to be less happy. It will therefore not be surprising when we encounter three incompatibilists who conclude (or are forced to conclude)<sup>15</sup> that Aristotle's ethics are hopelessly fractured. This will prepare the ground for my own position that the life one *should* lead is relative to one's particular human nature.

### **B. The Two Excellences**

The origin of the problem can be traced to Aristotle's most basic ethical convictions, found in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In order for ethics to exist and be objective, there must be some standard of evaluation by which an action may be judged. It is possible to identify a standard if a thing has a characteristic activity, for if it has a characteristic activity, then it is possible to judge whether that characteristic activity is being completed poorly or

<sup>14</sup> ... ἡ δὲ τοῦ νοῦ ἐνέργεια...δοκεῖ θεωρητικὴ οὐσα, *NE* 1177b16

<sup>15</sup> Lear thinks that his incompatibilism does not mean that the *NE* is hopelessly fractured, as other incompatibilists do. However, I will argue that his incompatibilism still threatens to undermine the coherency of Aristotle's advice.

excellently. In the case of an organism such as an eye, it is easy to identify its characteristic activity as seeing, and so on with most other parts of a body. A harpist also has a characteristic activity, although in most cases only a good music critic would be in a position to evaluate the quality of the harping. But even the non-music critic is confident that such a standard exists. Unlike harpists or eyes, however, it is not immediately clear if there is a characteristic activity of a human *qua* human, and if there were, how it could be found.

Aristotle begins by recognizing that if there is something that characterizes human activity, it cannot be an activity that is shared by other species. For example, reproduction cannot be the characteristic activity of human beings. That clearly does not set the human species apart because we share that characteristic with non-human animals. This also rules out the human capability to turn food into nourishment: “the excellence of this seems to be common to all and not specifically human” (*NE* 1102b4). But even though these activities themselves are not characteristically human, Aristotle gleans an important observation from them which orients his search for a human function. He observes that rational activity permeates all human activity (*NE* 1098a3), including the activities that we share with plants and animals. Humans, like plants, take in food and turn it into nourishment, but humans deliberate about with what to nourish ourselves. It is possible for a person to worry that consumption of junk food will lead to unhealthiness, and wishing to avoid this end, we decline the junk food. Similarly, the perceptual capacity of some mammals is not significantly different than that of humans in-itself, except that humans are able to turn perception into memories, and then experiences, and then ideas.

Apparently relying on this observation, Aristotle concludes that “the function of man is an activity of soul in accordance with, or not without, rational principle...” (*NE* 1098a6-7). The identification of the function as rational activity is easily combined with the arguments that have

come before: one can judge another's activity by judging whether the characteristic activity is being done well or poorly: "human good turns out to be activity of soul in conformity with excellence..." (*NE* 1098a16-7).

But even if we can agree that human beings *should* engage in rational activity, there are two further difficulties with applying this standard to any particular human life. The first is that Aristotle identifies not one but two ways to manifest rational activity. Aristotle identifies one kind of activity as rational activity because it is possible to engage our mind, that is, reason, "in the strict sense and in itself" (*NE* 1103a2). This activity can be called theoretical, and it is rational activity in-itself. But there is another way in which we can engage in rational activity. This is true despite the fact that Aristotle is unable to find another rational element in our soul. It cannot be the nutritive faculty, for neither is the nutritive faculty rational, nor does it have a share in reason. There is only the appetitive part of our soul remaining: "there seems to be another irrational element in the soul – one which in a sense, however, shares in a rational principle" (*NE* 1102b13-14).

The appetitive element shares in the rational part of the soul in the sense that it obeys it or not, in the same way that the one has "a tendency to obey as one does one's father" (*NE* 1103a3). There is then, another activity that requires the use of our rationality, for only the rational part of our soul is able to command the appetitive part and keep it in line: "the appetitive and in general the desiring element in a sense shares in [the rational principle], in so far as it listens to and obeys it" (*NE* 1102b30-31). And so there are two ways that human beings participate in rational activity. The first is theoretical, since it exercises reason in itself; the other is practical, since in controlling desires, it inevitably dictates how one interacts with others: "Excellence, then, [is] of two kinds, intellectual and moral" (*NE* 1103a14).

A second problem is that this still does not yield a standard of evaluation by which we can judge a particular human as performing its function excellently or poorly. Our situation, therefore, is similar to an untrained music critic. We know that there must be an excellent way for the flautist to flute, but we do not know that standard well enough to praise a good flautist as a virtuoso. In the same way, Aristotle has so far demonstrated that rational activity is the characteristic activity of a human being, but we still do not know the criterion that we may use to separate excellence from mediocrity. And since there are two excellences, there will be two criteria.

Aristotle does not have trouble in identifying the excellence that obtains of moral activity. Aristotle borrows his general method from Plato, for just as Plato thought we could get a clue to the condition of the just soul by understanding the condition of a just state because justice is more obvious in a state, so also Aristotle says “to gain light on things imperceptible we must use the evidence of sensible things” (*NE* 1104a14). What is obvious is that not only is there an excellence of the body, but that excellence is ruined by excess or deficiency: “excessive and defective exercise destroys the strength, and similarly drink or food which is above or below a certain amount destroys the health” (*NE* 1104a15-16). Since the state of excellence of the body is gained through moderation, so also it is likely that the excellence of the soul does as well. Proportionate moral activities such as temperance or courage promote this state of excellence. And once this state of the soul has become instilled by habituation, a person will live well by exercising this excellent state. There will also be activity that is rational in itself, which Aristotle calls contemplation (*NE* 1177b16). What distinguishes excellent from poor contemplation, however, is far less obvious, and can only be discussed after the nature of contemplation is understood.

### C. Two Excellences, Two Lives

At first glance, it does not seem problematic that there are two human excellences. It seems easy to imagine a life where the practical and theoretical excellences are integrated quite well: a man spends most of his time in contemplation, but basically lives a just life and is perhaps even actively involved in the life of the polis on occasion. John Cooper calls this a “bipartite conception of human flourishing” (147).<sup>16</sup> And not only is this integrated life imaginable, but Aristotle seems to indicate his belief that it is realistic in the *Eudemian Ethics*:

...the parts of the soul partaking of reason are two...the one by its natural tendency to command, the other by its natural tendency to obey and listen...For, if we speak of him *qua* man, he must have the power of reasoning, a governing principle, action; but reason governs not reason, but desire and the passions; he must have these parts. And just as general good condition of the body is compounded of the partial excellences, so also is the excellence of soul, *qua* end (*EE* 1219b29-1221a4).<sup>17</sup>

Aristotle is relying on his well-worn analogy between the excellence of the body and the excellence of the soul. The overall well-being of the body is dependent not only on the health of the heart, but on having a certain amount of muscle mass, etc. So there are several excellences that must obtain if a body can be said to be doing well. By analogy, the two excellences of the human soul - intellectual excellence and practical excellence - are necessary for complete human flourishing. This, at least, is the overall theme of the *Eudemian Ethics* and most of the *Nicomachean Ethics* according to Cooper:

A human being necessarily possesses a mind and also desires, so that he is necessarily at once an emotional and intellectual being. Having both intellectual and emotional needs... a human being needs both intellectual and moral virtues in order to achieve all the good things attaching to the two parts of his nature (Cooper 147).

It is of concern, then, when Aristotle destroys this rosy picture of the integrated life in book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

<sup>16</sup> Cooper, John M (1986). *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*. Hackett Publishing Company; Indianapolis.

<sup>17</sup> *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Volume Two. Bollington Series LXXI.2; Princeton University Press. *Eudemian Ethics* translated by J. Solomon.

If happiness is activity in accordance with excellence, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest excellence; and this will be that of the best thing in us... the life according to intellect is best and pleasantest...[and] happiest. But in a secondary degree the life in accordance with the other kind of excellence is happy (*NE* 1177a11-1178a10).

Aristotle has constructed a hierarchy between the two excellences, with practical excellence on the bottom. By itself, that would be no problem for a life devoted to both sorts of virtues. The problem is that Aristotle seems to be saying that devotion to these two different excellences requires two different lives, as indicated by the phrase ‘the *life* according to the intellect.’ This runs against the bipartite conception, which indicates they can both be cultivated in a single life.

There is a second problem that can be derived from this first one. Most analyses of Aristotelian ethics take it that Aristotle had a value system that is roughly similar to a contemporary Western value system. We laud generosity and courage, and so does Aristotle. We discourage murder and robbery, and so does Aristotle. Indeed, it does seem that Aristotle’s conception of a life devoted to practical virtues is acceptable by mainstream ethical standards. But if Aristotle is describing a life devoted to the cultivation of the intellect to the exclusion of the practical virtues, then it seems that there is nothing to constrain the actions of the philosophers. Richard Kraut<sup>18</sup> expresses (although he does not agree with) this initial concern:

...the difference (indeed, incompatibility) between the two lives would be far more striking than their similarities. Philosophers would not have ethical virtues; instead, they would hold themselves ready to do whatever is contrary to virtue in order to increase their opportunities for contemplating. By contrast, politicians, being good people, would never do anything contrary to virtue (Kraut 22).

Since Aristotle is usually taken as having the same general values as the contemporary West, this would be an unacceptable interpretation.

The concern that philosophers could lead fundamentally unjust lives should not be taken seriously. Aristotle remarks in reference to the person who lives a life of contemplation that “in

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<sup>18</sup> Kraut, Richard. (1989). *Aristotle on the Human Good*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

so far as he is a man and lives with a number of people, he chooses to do excellent acts” (*NE* 1178b6-7). This appears to be a description, rather than a prescription. But the worry that these philosophers are not truly ethical individuals is still a serious one. Aristotle distinguishes himself from the utilitarian by giving special significance to the reason why one does something, not just the fact that they do it:

...honour, pleasure, reason, and every excellence we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose them), but we should choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that through them we shall be happy (*NE* 1097b1-5).

It seems that the philosopher chooses excellent actions neither for himself nor for the sake of happiness. Rather, he chooses them, as Aristotle says, only in so far as he lives with other people. So while we don't have to worry about our philosopher robbing a bank, we cannot expect our philosopher to seek out ethical action for the sake of flourishing. His flourishing comes through the activity of contemplation, and that is what makes him happy. If we interpret Aristotle as advancing two separate lives, therefore, there will be some who are not ethical people. They lead ethical lives, but their happiness is not derived from excellent action. Some interpreters find this consequence unpalatable, and so seek to show how a 'mixed life' – one which brings together both kinds of virtue – is the one that is happiest for humans.

For example, Cooper identifies one such argument that holds that “Aristotle is not contrasting and ranking two separate modes of life, but two integral parts of a single mode of life” (159). In many modern languages, it makes perfect sense to describe one's personal life as opposed to his public life, his religious life as opposed to his political life, his family life as opposed to his communal life. These of course are all aspects of a single life. The argument is that one can have both an intellectual life and a political life in the same way as they have both a private and public life. Cooper argues that the problem is that the Greek word, βίος, while

properly translated as “life,” cannot be used to pick out an aspect of one’s general life: “it means always “mode of life,” and in any one period of time one can only have one mode of life” (160). So when Aristotle describes ὁ κατὰ τὸν νοῦν βίος, he means a lifestyle – that towards which one’s life is oriented, rather than a quadrant within a single life.

Compatibilism also requires that there be two fundamental goods in a single life. This is a further reason to be pessimistic about a successful future compatibilist argument, because if there are two fundamental goods in one’s life, there would be no chief good. This is quite opposed to Aristotle’s doctrine of happiness.<sup>19</sup> In saying that a life which cultivates both practical and theoretical excellence is the best life for humans, they are implying that sometimes the best thing to do would be to take a break from contemplating. In the context of a single life, these times will be inevitable. In Kraut’s words, this is to place an “upper bound” on contemplation and to believe that “a human life can fail to be happiest because the person leading it assigns too much weight to contemplation and overestimates its intrinsic worth” (Kraut 31).

One problem with this thesis is its complete lack of textual support, as Aristotle never indicates that it is ever desirable for a philosopher to seek less contemplation. That is, this interpretation is an imaginative possibility constructed to fill in the gaps; at best, it is what Aristotle meant to say. But what Aristotle actually does say is that “in a *secondary* degree the life in accordance with the other kind of excellence [i.e. practical] is happy” (*NE* 1178a9-10, my italics). Aristotle simply never recommends stopping the happiest activity in order to do the second happiest. This is consistent with Aristotle’s argument that each life will only have a single chief good. It is true that both lifestyles will require the necessities (*NE* 1178a26) - obviously the philosopher would die if he never stops his contemplation to eat. But in that case, food derives its goodness from contemplation; it is good only insofar as it allows one to

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<sup>19</sup> *NE* 1094a1-23



contemplate. What we are considering is whether an individual would *sometimes* pursue contemplation for the sake of itself and *sometimes* take a break and pursue excellent political action for the sake of itself. If a person could even live life with two basic orientations that would often pull him in different directions, Aristotle never mentions it, and it is not clear how it would be possible.<sup>20</sup>

#### **D. The Problem with Incompatibilism**

Cooper and Kraut have argued convincingly against compatibilism by showing that Aristotle really intended the two excellences to be pursued in two different lives.<sup>21</sup> But what is unsatisfying about their analyses is that they have difficulty explaining why Aristotle would bother to describe the political life at all. On the one hand, it is obvious that Aristotle has a positive view of the political life, for he passionately, articulately, and at great length defends its value. On the other hand, Aristotle clearly argues in book X that the life of the philosopher is to be preferred to the life of the politician. If the two lives are incompatible, one leads to greater happiness, and we human beings have the choice to lead one or the other, it would be insipid for anyone to choose the political life. That would be, paradoxically, to wish to be less happy than one could be.

This is most clear in Kraut's analysis of the matter. He argues that "the opening book [of the *Nicomachean Ethics*] raises a major question – should we be philosophers or politicians?" (Kraut 44). He sees Aristotle as a sort of career counselor: "[t]he two lives – one in accordance with understanding, the other in accordance with practical virtue – are the two main options between which Aristotle's leisured male audience had to choose" (Kraut 27).

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<sup>20</sup> See Kraut, pp. 23-39, and Cooper, pp.155-168.

<sup>21</sup> Kraut also points out that in 1178a25-b6 Aristotle argues that the life of the philosopher is better because it requires fewer external goods. This indicates that the philosophical life is a different life. I take this argument to be distinct yet equally convincing to the previous argument.

According to Kraut, we are left without a rigorous clue about which life we should choose until the very end of the *NE*, when Aristotle introduces reasons that Kraut accepts as decisive, leading us to conclude that “the more we contemplate the happier we are. Any other way we have of being happy must be a second best and imperfect way of living our lives” (Kraut 67). Kraut emphasizes that the political life is indeed a happy life, but not a perfectly happy life; perfect happiness is reserved for the philosopher. Kraut therefore implicitly believes that when Aristotle is describing the political life, he is describing a life that is no human being should want to live.

Cooper is forced into the same awkward conclusion as Kraut. Cooper tries to resolve the dilemma by emphasizing Aristotle’s words that the “intellect more than anything else *is* man” (*NE* 1178a8). Cooper insists that the recommendation to lead the life of the philosopher follows directly from this admission; all that is necessary is that one “accepts that one *is* his theoretical mind” (Cooper 168). And one should indeed accept this, according to Cooper’s Aristotle: “In all of this, Aristotle contrives to make it appear both *impious* and *stupid* for anyone not to regard himself as a purely intellectual being” (Cooper 177, my italics). But even if Cooper is right that each human being has a ‘pure’ intellectual nature, the problem still retains the same force in different form: if leading the political life is a perfect waste of time because it is based on a wrongheaded understanding of human nature, then why did Aristotle describe a life based on this nature in such detail and with such affection? It should be obvious that he was not rehearsing some kind of abstract exercise; Aristotle really believed that there are some extant individuals who *should* live the political life.

It seems that Cooper simply finds fault with Aristotle here. He surprisingly never takes back his harsh words of ‘impious’ and ‘stupid,’ and he lets this be the end of the matter: “...whereas in the *Eudemian Ethics* such a life [i.e. the mixed life] is the highest ideal conceived,

in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in the final analysis, Aristotle both conceives and prefers another, intellectualist, ideal...Many will find much to regret in this” (Cooper 179-180). Cooper, apparently, takes Aristotle to have been inconsistent, and leaves Aristotle to answer for his own supposed mistakes. Furthermore, it does not seem as though Cooper is optimistic that this difficulty can even be explained. Cooper is therefore faced with Kraut’s problem: they both must believe that Aristotle had wasted his time in describing the life of the politician. One will only live that life if one fails to identify oneself with the intellect. And a person who fails to do this is, in Cooper’s words, both ‘stupid’ and ‘impious.’

Jonathan Lear gives an answer which at first seems more promising. He argues that the choice between the political life and the philosophical life is not a genuine choice, for “if [a person] is in a position to live a divine life, there is no question but that he should” (Lear 315). One comes to be in this position, according to Lear, if two things align, for “either by material necessity or by lack of ability, most men are excluded from the life of contemplation. It is the rare person who has both the material means and the intellectual ability to pursue the contemplative life...” (Lear 313). So Lear believes that there is no choice in the matter. Both of the lives are happy lives, but the life of contemplation is happier. One would never choose the less happy life. Rather, whether one lives the life of political activity is decided by factors that are more or less out of one’s control.

Lear is circling the truth of the matter, but his analysis still commits him to an unpalatable conclusion. An indication is that he still finds it necessary to attribute a curious paradox to Aristotle, the master of logic: “Aristotle’s man is most himself when he is least himself” (316). Lear is referring to Aristotle’s apparently contradictory claims that people are political animals and thus will be happiest when living the ethical life in the polis, *and also* that

people will be happiest when living the life of contemplation outside of communal life. This is Aristotle's "highly paradoxical conception of man: as driven by his nature to transcend his nature" (Lear 309).

Lear, however, believes that the paradox will fall away if we attend to Aristotle's views on the nature of soul, for "his metaphysical analysis of man as a composite of form and matter enables him to conceive man as radically divided. Man is a composite, and yet he is most truly the highest element in his form" (Lear 319). In order to give a complete analysis of a person, one must give an account of the form and a separate one of the matter. This is because the human form or soul is not like the essence of 'concavity,' which shows up sometimes in wood, sometimes in metal, etc. In the case of concavity, it is appropriate to examine its essence apart from any concave things, since its material constitution is not an essential part of it. But the human soul is like 'snub,' which only shows up enmattered in the nose; that is, there are snub noses, but there are no other instances of snub. This indicates that snubness has flesh as part of its essence. What Lear seems to be saying, then, is the paradox could be circumvented this way: Aristotle meant that man *qua* composite is a political animal, but man *qua* mind is not a political animal - a philosophical animal, perhaps.

This only resolves the paradox at great cost. It is one thing to consider man in two ways – as a composite on one hand, and as a mind on the other. But the *Ethics* is intended to be a practical document. Aristotle is trying to articulate and analyze the kind of life that will most contribute to human flourishing. Lear has taken Aristotle to be saying that man *qua* form has the mind as his highest element. But there are, in fact, no human beings who are form only; all of us humans are compounds of form and matter. Lear, then, has committed the opposite mistake that Cooper did. Cooper's Aristotle describes the political life, but claims that it is a life that no one

should live. Lear's implications would require us to conclude that what Aristotle describes as the philosophical life is a life that no one should live, since all people are in fact 'composites.'

### **E. Beasts, Humans, Gods: Life Inside and Outside the Polis**

The key to a proper resolution of this conflict is to understand Aristotle's association of the life one should lead with his notion of a human nature. In recommending the political life, Cooper points out that Aristotle is assuming a certain conception of human nature, namely, that a person is "an intellectual...but also an emotional being. For anyone who has this conception of himself, the moral virtues and their exercise would also seem an essential good to be aimed at in any suitable life" (Cooper 156). This allows us some insight into X.7, when Aristotle appears to change course unannounced by insisting that one should live the intellectual life and not the life of the politician. The only way that such a dramatic change could be understood is if Aristotle is also changing his conception of human nature. And indeed, that is what we see him doing in this passage when he states that the intellect "more than anything else *is* man" (*NE* 1178a9). The intellectual life, then, can be identified as the life of greatest flourishing only because Aristotle can also identify human beings with their intellect.

What orthodox analyses of Aristotelian ethics have in common is that they assume that there is only one human nature for Aristotle. This assumption has led to problematic attempts to answer the question of how the two lives are related, and so it is prudent to examine the possibility that Aristotle understood that there was more than one human nature. It may be helpful first to note that the theory of multiple human natures was familiar to him, for it is Plato who first gave it powerful expression. Socrates famously expresses it mythical form in the *Republic*:<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Plato: Collected Dialogues*. Edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Bollington Series LXXI: Princeton University Press, 1961 ed. *Republic* translated by Paul Shorey.

...God in fashioning those...who are fitted to hold rule mingled gold in their generation, for which reason they are the most precious – but in the helpers silver, and iron and brass in the farmers and other craftsmen...the first injunction god lays upon the rulers is that of nothing else: they are to be such careful guardians and so intently observant as of the intermixture to them with an infusion of brass or iron...they shall by no means give way to pity in their treatment of them, *but shall assign to each the status due to his nature...* (415a-c, my italics).

Plato is advocating the idea that nature has given each person one of three natures, and each of those natures equips one for a certain life. One's proper role in life, therefore, is not determined by one's own choices. There is some evidence that shows that Aristotle does retain at least traces of this idea.

For instance, that there are at least two human natures for Aristotle is not controversial. Aristotle states his belief very plainly when examining the institution of slavery. Importantly, the kind of slavery Aristotle defends is natural slavery. He does not believe that those who are not slaves by nature should be enslaved: "one cannot use the term 'slave' properly of one who is undeserving of being a slave; otherwise we should find among slaves and descendents of slaves even men of the noblest birth, should any of them be captured and sold" (*POL* 1255a25-8).<sup>23</sup> A man is a natural slave if "he participates in reason so far as to recognize it but not so as to possess it" (*POL* 1254b21). What Aristotle is committed to is the existence of human beings, so identified by their biological characteristics, who are by nature born without the ability to possess reason.

Furthermore, he characterizes this life as a *bestial* life: "the use made of slaves hardly differs at all from that of tame animals: they both help with their bodies to supply our essential needs" (*POL* 1254b24-5). Elsewhere, Aristotle seems to take the bestial, slavish, and hedonistic life as similar, if not identical: "...most men, and men of the most vulgar type, seem (not without

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<sup>23</sup> *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Volume Two. Bollington Series LXXI.2; Princeton University Press, 1984 ed. *Politics* translated by B. Jowett

some reason) to identify the good, or happiness, with *pleasure*...Now the mass of mankind are evidently quite *slavish* in their tastes, preferring a life suitable to *beasts*..." (NE 1095b14-5, my italics). So it is that the life of pleasure is a synonym for the bestial life which is in turn synonymous with the slavish life.

Armed with the knowledge that Aristotle did not believe that there was a single human nature because one was bestial, we should consider it possible that when Aristotle spoke of beasts, humans, and gods, he was referring to three types of human natures: "Whatever is incapable of participating in the association which we call the state, a dumb animal for example, and equally whatever is perfectly self-sufficient and has no need (e.g. a god), is not part of the state at all" (POL 1253a27-9). Aristotle gives two examples of beings that do not belong in the state – a 'dumb animal,' and a 'god.' Human slaves are not dumb animals, but their life *is* bestial.

What is the state of the soul of someone who by nature lives this life? Aristotle has identified a slave as one who does not possess reason but can recognize it, so it follows that this person must be dominated by an irrational element in his soul. For Aristotle, there are two irrational parts of the soul, the nutritive part, which has no share in reason, and the appetitive part, which does share in reason "in so far as it listens to and obeys it" (NE 1102b31). This paternal language of the interaction of the rational part and the appetitive part is explicit: the appetitive part has "a tendency to obey [the rational part] as one does one's father" (NE 1103a3). This is not vaguely reminiscent of Aristotle's analysis of the relationship between the master and the slave: "...the [slave] must be ruled, [while] the other should exercise the rule for which he is fitted by nature, thus being the master...and the slave is in a sense a part of his master, a living but separate part of his body" (POL 1255b7-11). Aristotle believes that it is unjust to enslave

those who are not slaves by nature. Conversely, it would be unjust to let natural slaves live as free people; therefore it is an act of justice to enslave a person who is a natural slave.

Most historical defenders of the institution of slavery understood slavery as essentially exploitative, but found justification for it on other grounds. Aristotle's defense of slavery is of a different character entirely. Far from being exploitative, it is mutually beneficial. The master and the slave need each other no less than the appetitive and rational element in the soul need each other. Therefore, that Aristotle either intended or would at least endorse the analogy between the slavish (or hedonistic or bestial) life and the appetitive part in the soul is clear. And it could not be the case that the slave does not at all possess the rational part of his soul, for if that were lacking, he would actually be a beast. But he is only a beast insofar as the constitution of his soul forces him to lead a bestial life. It must be, then, that the rational part of his soul is there, but it is *simply not the authoritative or dominant part of his soul*. Aristotle forces us to this conclusion: this person is a human *qua* biology, but is a beast *qua* psychology.

This notion that the slave has the rational part of his soul but does not have it as the authoritative part of his soul contradicts the usual understanding of Aristotle. The relevant text is from *NE* X.7, which is worth quoting at length:

But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more than it does in power and worth surpass everything. This would seem to be each man, since it is the authoritative and better part [τὸ κύριον καὶ ἄμεινον] of him. It would be strange, then, if he were to choose not the life of himself but that of someone else. And what we said before will apply now; that which is proper to each thing is by nature best and most pleasant for each thing; for man, therefore, the life according to the intellect is best and pleasantest, since intellect more than anything else is man. This life therefore is also the happiest (*NE* 1177b31-1178a8).

About the intellectual part of the soul, the translation has it that “This would seem actually to be each man, *since* it is the authoritative and better part of him...”, and again, “...therefore the life



according to intellect is best and pleasantest, *since* intellect more than anything else is man” (*NE* 1178a, my italics). Many English translations make it appear as though Aristotle is here identifying the essence of each human being with the intellectual part of his soul. For all human beings, then, the intellectual life is best. It may be this sort of translation which has led many commentators to assume this sort of reconstruction:

- 1) If the intellectual part is the authoritative and better part (τὸ κύριον καὶ ἄμεινον) of all humans, then all humans should live the intellectual life.
- 2) The intellectual part is the authoritative and best part for all humans.
- 3) Therefore the intellectual life is the best life for all humans.

Before parsing the text, a reminder may be useful. Whatever Aristotle meant in this passage, it could not have been that *all* men have the intellectual part of their soul as the most authoritative and best part, for slaves are men, and they do not have the intellectual part as their most authoritative part. This should be a clue that this translation is misleading. In Greek, Aristotle’s phrase ‘since this is the authoritative and better part’ is ‘εἴπερ τὸ κύριον καὶ ἄμεινον.’ While it is true that εἴπερ can be used as a word of conclusion, it can also introduce a condition, and so it is also appropriate to render εἴπερ as ‘if really,’ or ‘if indeed,’ yielding this as an alternative translation: “It would seem that each person is his intellectual part *if he really has this part as the authoritative and better part.*”

What this translation leaves room for is the possibility that while some person X does in fact possess the intellectual part (for all those in the human species do by definition), *in X’s case it is not the authoritative part.* A few lines later, εἴπερ shows up again when Aristotle says “So also for a human being the intellectual life is best, εἴπερ this most of all is the human being.” Orthodox commentators would suggest that the intellectual part is in fact the higher and better part *in all humans.* But I am suggesting the possibility that we must attend to the nature of

whatever particular human we are examining before dispensing ethical advice. Perhaps the person that we are examining here, Z, does in fact have the intellectual part as the authoritative and better part. In that case the best life for Z is the contemplative life; that is the life in which Z will flourish to the greatest degree. There is something else we know about Z, namely that while he is a biological human being (just like the slave), in another sense, he is a god because the intellectual life is “too high for man; for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him” (NE 1177b26-7). He is therefore a human being *qua* biology, but a god *qua* psychology.

And we know that Aristotle insists that there is at least one other type of person, for X happens to be a slave by nature since he does not have the intellectual part of the most authoritative part of *his* soul. Of course, no one disputes that Aristotle means that the intellectual part of the soul is the best. This competing interpretation does not contradict this. It merely follows that the slave does not have the best life available to him because he does not have the best part as the authority in his soul, and this is due to nature, not habituation. For X, the life of contemplation would be miserable, which is why there is a “feeling a friendship between master and slave, wherever they are fitted for this relationship...” (POL 1255b12-3). The slave is dependent on the rational nature of the master, for the master is one who *does* have the intellectual part as the authoritative part of *his* soul.

We are now in position to examine whether there is a third human nature. If such a third type existed, and the nature of this type is suited for the political life because that it the life in which it flourishes in the highest degree, then we would be able to avoid both Cooper’s conclusion that Aristotle wasted his time describing the political life, and Lear’s equally problematic conclusion that Aristotle wasted his time describing the intellectual life. This person

would not be a human not only biologically but also according to his psychological nature. It should be recalled that Cooper notices the necessary association between one's nature and the type of life in which one will flourish to the highest degree. He says that the life of contemplation

would not seem reasonable at all to anyone who regards himself, as Aristotle seems to do in the *Eudemian Ethics*, as not merely an intellectual but also an emotional being. For anyone who has this conception of himself, the moral virtues and their exercise would also seem an essential good to be aimed at in any suitable life (Cooper 156).

Cooper here correctly identifies political activity as an essential element in the life of a person who is essentially partly emotional and partly intellectual.<sup>24</sup> Cooper is also right to point out that when Aristotle lists the reasons why the life according to the intellect is higher (*NE* 1177a18-b26), it only shows that it is “the best among human activities...[It] certainly does not tend to show that this activity would reasonably be pursued as a dominant end in anyone's life” (Cooper 156-7). That is, this argument acquires force only if one's nature is identified as purely intellectual. So Cooper's Aristotle, in book X, “means to challenge this assumption...that a human being is to be conceived of not merely as an intellectual but also an emotional being” (Cooper 157). An element in the life of human being, therefore, is the political life if and only if a person's nature is partly intellectual and partly emotional. But Cooper's Aristotle believes that such people do not exist. This is why Cooper must conclude that almost all of Aristotle's ethical and political corpus is awkwardly describing a life that only a stupid and impious person would lead.

This, of course, must be a mistake. The answer is that those who are human beings biologically and psychologically should exercise excellence through political activity, because there is actually no rival option: “the activities in accordance with this [life] befit our human

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<sup>24</sup> Cooper defends his interpretation of *to suntheton*, the compound, that it is a nature mixed with emotion rooted in the body and the intellect, in a footnote on 157.

estate” (*NE* 1178a10). Excellence through contemplation is simply not human excellence; it is divine excellence in which divine human beings participate and flourish. People have no real choice in the matter, nor is it a question of habituation. A slave, by habituation, cannot come to have the intellectual part of his soul as the authoritative part, and neither can the true man. They are by nature destined to flourish in the highest degree in the bestial and political life, respectively. What people with either of these two natures have in common is that it would be a mistake for either to attempt to engage in a life of contemplation. Given the true man’s nature as at least partly an emotional being, he will not flourish through such an attempt. A slave, who is even more distant from his rational part, would certainly be miserable attempting to live the life of contemplation; in fact, it would be an injustice against him to force him into it, since he will necessarily be unsuccessful. But if one finds oneself with an intellectual nature, then it will necessarily be that the political life will only yield flourishing in the second degree (*NE* 1178a9). As Lear correctly points out, nature will exclude most men from the contemplative life because they possess a “lack of innate ability” (Lear 313).

The safest conclusion that we can make, then, is that rational activity as contemplation is not human excellence at all. It is divine excellence, and it is only tempting to refer to it as human excellence because human beings sometimes engage in it. But insofar as they do, they are literally non-human in an important way: psychologically. The life of contemplation, then, is divine excellence in which some humans – the ones with divine natures – can and should participate, because it is in such a lifestyle that they will flourish in the highest degree.

The type of solution I have given explains why Aristotle recommends both the political life and the contemplative life at different times; it is because his recommendation is relative to the nature of the one to whom he is speaking. Therefore some should live a divine life because

they have the intellectual part as the most authoritative part of their soul. For the sake of their happiness, they therefore must live ‘ὁ κατὰ τὸν νοῦν βίος.’ It is they, Aristotle apparently among them, who “must [strive], so far as we can, to make ourselves immortal” (*NE* 1177b33).

## Chapter Two: Aristotle on the Human Intellect

### Chapter Summary by Section

- A. *Introduction.* In this chapter, I address the second barrier to understanding Aristotle's divinity thesis, which is a misunderstanding of the nature of human contemplation. I will argue that contemplation is active intellectual intuition.
- B. *Laying the Groundwork: Observations About Νοῦς as a Substance.* Νοῦς is a substance that is a separate substance from the human composite. What is important to observe at this point in my argument is that τὸ νοεῖν and τὸ θεωρεῖν are activities of νοῦς, while τὸ διανοεῖσθαι is an activity of the human composite.
- C. *An Account of Τὸ Νοεῖν.* Aristotle reserves the term 'τὸ νοεῖν' for passive intellectual intuition, which is a process in which humans acquire the intellectual form that is latent in physical objects.
- D. *An Account of Τὸ Θεωρεῖν.* Here I argue that the phrase "thought thinks itself" should be interpreted as 'mind intuits itself.' This is important because the mind just is the intellectual forms; the mind was nothing before its intuition of them. Therefore τὸ θεωρεῖν is intuition that is no longer passive but active, and *it is active because its actualization is internal to it*; ἡ θεωρία does not depend on encountering a particular in the world in which the form resides. It is therefore νοῦς' intuition *of itself*.
- E. *The Non-Identity of Τὸ Διανοεῖσθαι and Τὸ Θεωρεῖν.* Commentators often fail to make the distinction sections that C and D argue that Aristotle *did* make, and thus conflate τὸ διανοεῖσθαι and τὸ θεωρεῖν. This is illegitimate because τὸ θεωρεῖν is intuitive, not discursive.
- F. *The Non-Identity of Τὸ Διανοεῖσθαι and Τὸ Νοεῖν.* Translating τὸ διανοεῖσθαι and τὸ νοεῖν with the same word, 'thinking,' has the effect of making Aristotle's texts illogical. This is further evidence that the distinctions that I first recognized in sections C and D are distinctions that Aristotle intended to make.
- G. *The Mind Insofar as it Makes.* In DA III.5, Aristotle introduces his doctrine of the mind insofar as it makes. I argue both that this mind is introduced in order to account for the mind's two actualizations, and that this doctrine is in accord with my distinction between passive and active intuition.
- H. *Traditional Translations, Traditional Problems, New Solutions.* Here I summarize the implications of my findings so far. If we fail to notice the different ways that Aristotle uses the three terms for mental activity, then it seems that we must conclude that there is a qualitative difference between divine and human contemplation. If, however, we keep them properly segregated, a different picture emerges.
- I. *The Life of Contemplation.* One difficulty in accepting my interpretation that active intellectual intuition is the highest good is that active intellectual intuition seems rather boring. How can this be the best life? Wasn't Aristotle trying to say that the best life involved philosophic, discursive reasoning with others? Here I offer a solution.

## A. Introduction

In the ethical life, νοῦς has the task of controlling the appetites. In itself, however, its activity will be something else: ‘contemplation’ (θεωρητικὴ) is Aristotle’s word for “the activity of the mind” (*NE* 1177b16). The divinity thesis identifies the life of contemplation as divine, but what makes this life divine? There are at least three (non-exclusive) possibilities: human contemplation would be divine if 1) humans are engaged in the same activity in which God’s νοῦς engages when we contemplate, 2) νοῦς is a divine substance, or 3) our intellectual life is our attempt to imitate the activity of God’s life, in the same way that animals imitate God’s activity through reproduction. It is not controversial that Aristotle affirms the latter two possibilities,<sup>25</sup> but his acknowledgment of the first is not widely recognized.

It seems obvious that Aristotle *should* argue for the first possibility since he says in reference to contemplation that “God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are” (*Meta* 1072b24). This seems to be a straightforward indication that he sees a continuum between human and divine contemplation: human contemplation is divine contemplation, writ small. However, this is a difficult claim to accept because of some obvious and important asymmetries between human and divine thinking. Although I will not take up the nature of God’s mode of contemplation directly until Chapter Three, it is evident that Aristotle’s God, whatever else is true, contemplates eternally (*Meta* 1072b29). God also does not make discoveries because God does not encounter forms or make inferences, for that implies potentiality, and God is pure actuality (*Meta* 1072b29). Furthermore, the fact that God does not use sensation seems to exclude the possibility that God uses phantasms – images derived from sense experience – to think. The problem is that a brief observation of this list of divine characteristics makes it seem

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<sup>25</sup> Section B explains Aristotle’s affirmation of the second possibility. The third is advanced in *DA* 415a26-415b. Cf Chapter III.B

implausible on the face of it that human contemplation could be like divine contemplation *in any way*. Is human contemplation not tied to a body and thus destructible? Does it not make discoveries? Does it not rely on images? The issue, then, is not whether there is an asymmetry between the human and divine mind, but the nature of this asymmetry. It may be thought that this asymmetry shows that human contemplation is essentially different from divine contemplation. The present chapter argues the opposite point, namely that Aristotle seeks to establish that human and divine contemplation are the same kind of activity.

This can be shown by attending to Aristotle's understanding of the functions of the human mind. Two phrases he uses, τὸ διανοεῖσθαι and τὸ νοεῖν, are often both translated as 'thinking.' But it may turn out that translating both words as 'thinking' commits an important equivocation. An analysis of his uses of these words in context is necessary to determine whether they have different philosophical roles. I seek to establish that τὸ νοεῖν is better translated as 'intellectual intuiting,' while 'thinking' should be reserved only for τὸ διανοεῖσθαι, since Aristotle uses it to pick out the discursive function of νοῦς; in English, the phrase 'discursive thinking' is essentially redundant, since thinking already indicates judging and inferring. This distinction is important because as I will demonstrate, the failure to distinguish them leads some commentators to conflate contemplating (τὸ θεωρεῖν) and thinking (τὸ διανοεῖσθαι), and it is this conflation that gives rise to the problem of misunderstanding the asymmetry of human and divine contemplation.

### **B. Laying the Groundwork: Observations About Νοῦς as a Substance**

Before analyzing the functions of mind, it is necessary to begin by understanding the nature of νοῦς itself. Aristotle clearly believes that it is a divine substance. He articulates this



view when discussing the soul's capacities in general, in *De Anima*.<sup>26</sup> Unlike many uses of the term, Aristotle uses 'soul' simply as a way to pick out that which is alive; 'soul' functions as the mark of difference between natural bodies that are alive and those that are not: "Of natural bodies some have life in them, others not; by life we mean self-nutrition and growth and decay. It follows that every natural body which has life in it is a substance in the sense of a composite" (*DA* 412a12-15). In this sense plants have a soul, for they are capable of growth and decay, and growth and decay are types of motion. All things that have soul have this capacity for self-nutrition, but there are other capacities which are part of some souls, namely "the appetitive, the sensory, the locomotive, and the power of thinking" (*DA* 414a32). The sensory and appetitive capacities do not belong to plants, but to humans and non-human animals. And in addition to all these capacities, human beings are distinguished from all other species in that they also possess 'the power of thinking.'

It is easily shown that the capacities of soul besides thinking necessarily only exist enmattered: "If we consider the majority of [the capacities], there seems to be no case in which the soul can act or be acted upon without involving the body; e.g. anger, courage, appetite, and sensation generally" (*DA* 403a6-7). Aristotle is pointing out that it would not be possible to be courageous, for example, without a body. But it is not immediately clear that all psychic capacities are like this: "are [the capacities] all affections of the complex body and soul, or is there any one among them peculiar to the soul itself? To determine this is indispensable but difficult" (*DA* 403a3-5). Aristotle gives an immediate yet inconclusive answer: if there is one, it would be thinking. Aristotle chooses to leave this question unanswered for now, but he does

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<sup>26</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of *De Anima* are from: *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Volume One. Bollington Series LXXI.2; Princeton University Press, 1984 ed. *On the Soul* translated by J.A. Smith. As I will argue throughout the chapter, I regard this translation as mistaken and misleading in important ways. However, I will use the *Revised Oxford Translation* until I have established a better translation, after which time I will re-translate the controversial words, while retaining the rest of Smith's translation.

warn us that “if this too proves to be a form of imagination or to be impossible without imagination, it too requires a body as a condition of its existence” (*DA* 403a8-10).

Aristotle prepares the ground for a solution in *DA* I.4: “But νοῦς seems to be some substance born in us...” (*DA* 408b18).<sup>27</sup> His use of the word ‘substance’ (οὐσία) is significant. Aristotle is clear that the body and soul – soul understood in all its capacities mentioned so far – are not two conjoined substances. They are rather one substance, a composite, related as the power of sight is to the eye: “every natural body which has life in it is a substance in the sense of a composite” (*DA* 412a15-16). So any particular living thing is itself one substance composed of soul and body. Therefore, his use of ‘οὐσία’ signifies that he is speaking of a substance that inheres in the human composite. And it is not human, but divine, as the passage concludes: “[νοῦς] is, no doubt, something more divine and impassible” (*DA* 408b29).

Νοῦς, therefore, is a substance distinct from the composite. One reason he distinguishes it as a separate substance is because νοῦς differs from the rest of the composite with respect to the duration of its existence:

If it could be destroyed at all, it would be under the blunting of old age. What really happens is, however, exactly parallel to what happens in the case of the sense organs; if the old man could recover the proper kind of eye, he would see just as well as the young man... Thus it is that thinking [τὸ νοεῖν] and reflecting [τὸ θεωρεῖν] decline through the decay of some inward part and are themselves impassible [ἀπαθές]. Thinking [τὸ διανοεῖσθαι], loving, and hating are affections not of thought, but of that which has thought, so far as it has it. That is why, when this vehicle decays, memory and love cease; they were activities not of thought, but of the composite which has perished; thought [ὁ νοῦς] is, no doubt, something more divine and impassible (*DA* 408b18-31).

Aristotle has already said that all of our psychic capacities require a composite, although he has left the possibility that νοῦς may not. One consequence of psychic powers being essentially part of the composite is that they would be corruptible, for all matter is corruptible. Therefore, if there

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<sup>27</sup> This is my own translation of “ὁ δὲ νοῦς ἔοικεν ἐγγίνεσθαι οὐσία τις οὐσα.” I have left ‘nous’ un-translated since I am still establishing what it is.

is a capacity which is not necessarily enmattered, it may not be subject to decay. And indeed, Aristotle has just stated that “thought [νοῦς] seems to be...incapable of being destroyed” (*DA* 408b18).

This notion seems to contradict the appearances. We can observe the powers of mind declining with old age, and being entirely corrupted on the occasion of death along with all other psychic capacities. In this passage, Aristotle is acknowledging this obvious fact, but reconciling it with his notion that some mental activity is not corruptible. In the preceding paragraph, Aristotle has laid the groundwork for this insight: “...to say that it is the soul which is angry is as if we were to say that it is soul that weaves or builds houses. It is doubtless better...to say that it is the man who does this with his soul” (*DA* 408b13-14). In the same way, the substantial change that we observe is not necessarily of the substance of νοῦς itself, but of the substance in whom νοῦς is born – this particular man. Since he is the possessor of νοῦς, his substantial decay means that this particular substance which formerly carried νοῦς is no longer capable of thinking. However, νοῦς is not part of the substance which is this particular composite. With the phrase “in so far as it [i.e. the composite] has it [i.e. νοῦς],” Aristotle seems to be reaffirming the existence of νοῦς as an independent substance; it is something that the composite possesses, but its possession of it does not exhaust the substance of νοῦς.<sup>28</sup>

So not only is νοῦς a different substance than the composite, but it is a different kind of substance. An essential characteristic of the composite is its corruptibility. Since νοῦς is not corruptible, but ἀπαθές, it belongs to a different genus. And since τὸ νοεῖν and τὸ θεωρεῖν are affections of νοῦς, those functions in particular are incorruptible; since τὸ διανοεῖσθαι is an affection of the corruptible composite possessing νοῦς, it does in fact perish. Aristotle makes clear in II.2 that his comments about the incorruptibility of νοῦς in I.4 were not errant, nor were

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<sup>28</sup> See section G.

they a summary of another philosopher's views:<sup>29</sup> “We have no evidence as yet about thought [τοῦ νοῦ] or<sup>30</sup> the power of reflexion [τῆς θεωρητικῆς]; it seems to be a different kind [γένος ἕτερον] of soul, differing as what is eternal from what is perishable” (DA 413b25-26). Aristotle is again contrasting νοῦς and its activity with the “powers of self-nutrition, sensation, thinking [διανοητικῶ], and movement” (DA 413b12), and so emphasizing his distinction between what is properly an affection of the composite and what is a function of eternal substance. I turn now to accounts of the three functions of νοῦς (or the possessor of νοῦς) given in DA 408b18-31: τὸ νοεῖν, τὸ θεωρεῖν, and τὸ διανοεῖσθαι.

### C. An Account of Τὸ Νοεῖν

Before our experience with the world, our mind<sup>31</sup> is actually nothing, for it does not come stocked with ideas.<sup>32</sup> In order for thinking to begin, then, our mind must have contact with reality. Because the mind is related to the world in this way, Aristotle is sometimes taken to be committed to empiricism.<sup>33</sup> For the empiricist, sensation puts us into contact with reality, and through a process of induction, ideas come to exist in the mind. Thus, nothing but sensible intuition is required to account for our mind's contact with reality. However, this is not Aristotle's account<sup>34</sup> and is an impediment to a proper understanding of Aristotle's account of τὸ νοεῖν, for τὸ νοεῖν is also a process that puts the soul in immediate contact with reality even though it is not sensation.

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<sup>29</sup> A contention could be that in I.4, what Aristotle seems to describe as his own position is actually someone else's. Indeed, Book II opens by characterizing Book I “as our account of the views concerning the soul which have been handed on by our predecessors. Let us now make a completely fresh start...” (412a1-2). Thus, the present comments in II.2 are significant.

<sup>30</sup> The Greek is *kai*, indicating that this “or” is not to be taken as exclusive.

<sup>31</sup> Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will translate “νοῦς” as mind, even in Smith's text.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. DA 429b30-430a2, *Prior Analytics* 99b24-b31

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Barnes, Jonathan. (1975). *Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, and Leshner, James H. “The Meaning of Νοῦς in the Posterior Analytics.” *Phronesis* 18 (1973): 44-68.

<sup>34</sup> A full argument for this claim unfolds in Chapter 5

When I speak of τὸ νοεῖν putting our mind in contact with reality, I am referring to τὸ νοεῖν as it is used in *DA* III.4. This is in sharp contrast to Aristotle's use of τὸ νοεῖν in the previous passage, III.3. In that section, Aristotle considers whether the 'ancients', who "go so far as to identify thinking and perceiving" (*DA* 427a22) could be correct. He states their case as forcefully as he can:

There are two distinctive particularities by reference to which we characterize the soul – (1) local movement and (2) thinking [τὸ νοεῖν], understanding [φρονεῖν], and perceiving [τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι]. Thinking and understanding are regarded as akin to a form of perceiving; for in the one as well as the other the soul discriminates and is cognizant of something which is (*DA* 427a17-21).

One difficulty in considering whether τὸ νοεῖν is a type of perception is that there are at least two possible meanings of τὸ νοεῖν (to which a third will be added in the subsequent division):

"Thinking is...held to be part imagination [φαντασία], in part judgment [ὑπόληψις]" (*DA* 427b28).

Thinking in the sense of judging cannot be 'akin' to perceiving:

...thinking [τὸ νοεῖν] is...distinct from perceiving – I mean that in which we find rightness and wrongness – rightness in understanding, knowledge, true opinion, wrongness in their opposites: for perception of special objects of sense is always free from truth and error...while it is possible to think [διανοεῖσθαι] falsely as well as truly, and thought is found only where there is discourse of reason (*DA* 427b9-14).

In this passage, Aristotle has implied much about his position on τὸ νοεῖν: τὸ νοεῖν in *this* sense makes 'rightness and wrongness' possible, because it makes judgments (*DA* 427b15). Aristotle recognizes the uniqueness of this type of τὸ νοεῖν enough to give it its own name, τὸ διανοεῖσθαι; importantly, then, Aristotle's concept of τὸ διανοεῖσθαι *just is* τὸ νοεῖν insofar as it judges.

Furthermore, it is also impossible that τὸ νοεῖν, insofar as it is imagining, can be like perceiving for three reasons:

[s]ense is either a faculty or an activity...: imagination takes place in the absence of both, as e.g., in dreams. Again, sense is always present, imagination not. If actual imagination

and actual sensation were the same, imagination would be found in all brutes: this is held not to be the case...Again, sensations are always true, imaginations are for the most part false (*DA* 428a5-13).

This last consideration, that sensations are incorrigible while imaginings are not, also can be extended to exclude the possibility that understanding could be akin to perceiving, since understanding can often falls into error (*DA* 427b7). The common opinion of the ancients, then, that “[t]hinking and understanding are regarded as akin to a form of perceiving” (*DA* 427a20), is false.

Aristotle has thus used *DA* III.3 to prove that ‘judging-τὸ νοεῖν,’ ‘imagining-τὸ νοεῖν,’<sup>35</sup> and understanding are all unlike perceiving. III.4 now considers whether the opinions of the ancients might be true in another sense:

If thinking [τὸ νοεῖν] is like perceiving [τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι], it must be either a process in which the soul is acted upon by that which is capable of being thought, or a process different from but analogous to that (*DA* 429a15-16).

Two features of Aristotle’s analysis deserve attention here. First, the former uses of τὸ νοεῖν in III.3 are given specific names because of their unique functions, and thus the locution “τὸ νοεῖν” is no longer used in those cases. And second, his current (and subsequent) use of τὸ νοεῖν is something that *is* akin to perceiving.

Since he models this new sense of τὸ νοεῖν on perceiving (τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι), an account to τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι in is order. Sensation is an inherently passive process: “[s]ensation depends, as we have said, on a process of movement or affection from without, for it is held to be some sort of change of quality” (*DA* 416b32-34). Since our soul changes from a state of not-perceiving to perceiving, there is necessarily a movement. Movement, for Aristotle, is always from a potentiality to an actuality. And since our soul was brought to a state of actually perceiving, its potentiality must have been actualized by something external to it. Victor Kal’s summary is

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<sup>35</sup> Aristotle later names this capacity ‘*phantasia*.’

helpful: “[b]y the movement one pole gains that which the other already has. It receives, suffers, or undergoes the effect which proceeds from the other, the cause of the movement” (Kal 68).<sup>36</sup>

The two ends of the movement are the soul’s power of sensation and the object of sensation. The potential end is the power of sensation, and the actual end is the object that is perceived: “what has the power of sensation is potentially like what the perceived object is actually” (DA 418a3-4). Like any movement, before the movement starts the ends of the movement are in one sense dissimilar and in another similar. They are dissimilar because one side is potentially what the other is actually; they are similar because they are potentially identical: “while at the beginning of the process of its being acted upon the two interacting factors are dissimilar, at the end the one acted upon is assimilated to the other and is identical in quality with it” (DA 418a4-5).

In sensation, unlike other kinds of movement, the movement that takes place is immaterial, for the form (εἰδῶν) enters the soul without the matter (ἄνευ τῆς ὕλης):

Generally, about all perception, we can say that a sense is what has the power of receiving into itself the sensible forms of things [τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἰδῶν] without the matter, in the way in which a piece of wax takes on the impress of signet-ring without the iron or gold;...in a similar way the sense is affected by what is colored or flavored or sounding not insofar as each is what it is, but insofar as it is of such and such a sort and according to its form [τὸν λόγον] (DA 424a16-23).

This is despite the fact that what is affected is material, for “a primary sense-organ is that in which such a power is seated” (DA 424a24). In the case of sense perception, the sense organs receive the sensible form, and so not only are they passive but also capable of receiving the form in an unenmattered state which previously only existed as enmattered. Sensation is therefore intuitive: it is taking in an object which in this case is a sensible form.

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<sup>36</sup> Kal, Victor. (1988). *On Intuitive and Discursive Reasoning in Aristotle*. Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill Publishing.

Although τὸ νοεῖν in the sense of judging and imagining could not be modeled on perception, this sense of τὸ νοεῖν can:

If thinking [τὸ νοεῖν] is like perceiving [τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι], it must be either a process in which the soul is acted upon by that which is capable of being thought, or a process different from but analogous to that. The thinking part of the soul must therefore be, while impassible, capable of receiving the form of an object [τὰ νοητά]; that is, must be potentially identical in character with its object without being the object. Thought must be related to what is thinkable, as sense is to what is sensible (*DA* 429a15-18).

The mind, in this function, is passive in the same way that sensation is, for the movement that our soul undergoes from potentiality to actuality is initiated by the object. The object in this case is not the sensible form (τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἰδῶν), but the intelligible form (τὰ νοητά). For Aristotle, both kinds of forms affect our mind through intuition. Τὸ νοεῖν is therefore intellectual intuiting, and ‘thinking’ is only an appropriate translation of ‘τὸ νοεῖν’ if ‘thinking’ can mean ‘intuiting.’ If one takes *DA* III.3 as proof that Aristotle takes τὸ νοεῖν as a discursive capacity because τὸ νοεῖν is a capacity for judging, one would be taking things quite out of context; *DA* III.3 presents a theory that Aristotle rejects, and τὸ διανοεῖσθαι is presented as a more appropriate term for the judging mind.<sup>37</sup> Intuiting is a movement, but the actuality exists entirely in the object, for the mind is nothing before being actualized by the intelligible form. In this sense, then, the mind is passive, and it is clear, at least, that it is active in discursivity; Aristotle, however, will argue that there are two ways for the mind to be active, and one of those is contemplating (τὸ θεωρεῖν).

A final note: Aristotle says that although τὸ νοεῖν is a function of a substance, νοῦς, which is a divine substance, τὸ νοεῖν is not divine because God’s intellect is essentially active, but τὸ νοεῖν is essentially passive.<sup>38</sup> It is a movement, but the movement does not originate in the mind, for the mind is nothing before being actualized by the intelligible form (τὰ νοητά).

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<sup>37</sup> Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will therefore translate τὸ νοεῖν as ‘intuiting’ and τὸ διανοεῖσθαι as ‘discursive reasoning,’ even in Smith’s text.

<sup>38</sup> *Meta* 1072b22-24



Aristotle is clear that there is nothing passive about God's intellect, and therefore, if Aristotle's divinity thesis expresses continuity between the human and divine intellect, he must explain the manner in which νοῦς *is* active. Aristotle argues that contemplating (τὸ θεωρεῖν) is such an activity.

#### **D. An Account of Τὸ Θεωρεῖν**

Aristotle says that after “mind has become each thing” – i.e. after its passive intuition of the form - “mind is then able to think (voεῖν) of itself” (DA 429b9). Elsewhere, he identifies this activity as the most worthwhile kind of activity,<sup>39</sup> and names it contemplation.<sup>40</sup> Since contemplation is the mind's activity, voεῖν in this case must not be passive. What I want to suggest is the following possibility: the phrase sometimes translated as ‘thought thinking itself’ is still an intuitive act of νοῦς, but it is no longer *passive* intuition, for there are no external, enmattered forms actualizing it. The difference is that νοῦς is intuiting unenmattered intelligible forms that are the complete constitution of itself. It is now *active* intuition because it is actualizing *itself*; that is to say, the source of its actualization is not external to it. Indeed, Aristotle even worries why this sort of actualizing is not always happening, because this actualization comes from the mind itself<sup>41</sup> rather than being dependent on the occasion of encountering an enmattered form (DA 430a5-6). I am suggesting that rendering ‘αὐτὸν voεῖ ὁ νοῦς’ as ‘thought thinks itself’ is as misleading as translating τὸ voεῖν with ‘thinking.’ Therefore, the meaning of ‘αὐτὸν voεῖ ὁ νοῦς’ when considered in context should be, according to my claim, ‘mind *intuits* itself’; rendering voεῖ(v) as ‘thinking’ is misleading, for thinking is normally understood as judging, and Aristotle has already made a decision to use a separate word to pick out the capacity for judgment. My argument for this position constitutes sections D & E.

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<sup>39</sup> *Meta* 1072b

<sup>40</sup> *NE* 1177b16

<sup>41</sup> This foreshadows Aristotle's discussion of the making mind in III.5. See section G.

Before receiving τὰ νοητά, the mind was purely potential. It had no existence to speak of, and only became actualized by τὰ νοητά: “What the mind intuits must be in it just as characters may be said to be on a writing-table on which nothing as yet actually stands written: this is exactly what happens with mind” (DA 429b33-430a2). This is why Aristotle calls the mind “the place of forms” (DA 429a27). The mind had no actuality, and so was distinguished from a thing like a flower insofar as flowers have no potential to receive intelligible forms at all. That is, neither the human mind before experience nor the flower possessed intelligible forms, but the mind is distinguished because it has the potential to receive the forms.

Aristotle re-affirms his notion that the mind only has potential existence before its reception of the forms at least twice: “Thus that in the soul which is called mind...is, before it intuits, not actually any real thing...It was a good idea to call the soul ‘the place of forms’...” (DA 429a22-28). The point is that before the intuition, the mind was pure potential; its present actuality, insofar as it is actual, is due entirely to the intuition of the forms. Aristotle makes the same point in the *Metaphysics*:

[a]nd mind intuits itself because it shares the nature of the object of intuition; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and intuiting its objects, so that mind and object of intuiting are the same. For that which is capable of receiving the object of intuition, i.e. the substance, is mind (*Meta* 1072b20-22).

After the intelligible forms ‘write’ on the mind, the mind is in a sense actualized, but it remains potential in another sense, for at times when it is not being used, it is not fully actualized: “its condition is still one of potentiality, but in a different sense from the potentiality which preceded the acquisition of knowledge by learning or discovery” (DA 429b7-9). The mind at this stage thus admits of both actuality and potentiality. It is actual because the mind that has received intelligible forms actually becomes those forms. It remains potential, however, insofar as the forms constituting the mind are not currently being intuited. A person that knows “is now

able to exercise the power on his own initiative” (DA 429b7), which of course in no way implies that he is currently doing so; he simply may do so whenever he chooses.

After the mind has received the intelligible forms and thus has become them, it can actively intuit those forms that it ‘knows’ without depending on encountering them in their material instantiation or in images.<sup>42</sup> This is why “there are two kinds of actuality corresponding to knowledge and reflecting” (DA 412a22). This process is explicitly referred to as contemplation. Contemplation, then, is the mind’s active possession of the forms:

...that which is capable of receiving the object of intuition...is mind. And it is *active* when it *possesses* [ἔχων] this object. Therefore the latter rather than the former is the divine element which mind seems to contain, and the act of contemplation [ἡ θεωρία] is what is most pleasantest and best (Meta 1072b22-24).

Aristotle therefore denies that νοῦς, in its passive employment - τὸ νοεῖν - is divine. This sort of intuition of the intelligible form is passive because its change is actualized by a form that is external to it. In this sense, its intuition is a reception. All intuition is affection by something simple. This is obviously true in the sensible and intelligible intuition of the enmattered forms, but this also seems to be true in the case of contemplation. The mind is still being affected by intelligible forms, although now the mind *just is* those forms, and so this affection is a self-affection. What makes intuition passive, therefore, is receptivity, not affection. While contemplation is divine because it is the activity of a divine substance, νοῦς, τὸ θεωρεῖν is divine in that sense and also in a much more important sense; it is intuition that is no longer passive but active, and *it is active because its actualization is internal to it*; ἡ θεωρία does not depend on encountering a particular in the world in which the form resides. It is therefore νοῦς’ intuition of

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<sup>42</sup> DA 431b2

*itself*.<sup>43</sup> This process, as I will argue in Chapter 3, is the same activity in which God engages completely and eternally.

### **E. The Non-Identity of Τὸ Διανοεῖσθαι and Τὸ Θεωρεῖν**

Νοῦς has a passive function (τὸ νοεῖν) in intuiting the intelligible forms, and an active one (τὸ θεωρεῖν) in possessing them. I have characterized both processes as essentially intuitive. But it is obvious that the human mind is active in another way, for we have discursive mental powers: we can make judgments, analyze arguments, connect or separate premises, make inferences, and change our conclusions in the face of new data. It is possible to believe, because ‘contemplation’ is Aristotle’s term for the activity of the mind, and discursive reasoning is a type of mental activity, that discursive reasoning must be identical with or at least a form of contemplation. I will reject that possibility; τὸ διανοεῖσθαι is the term that Aristotle reserved to refer to discursive as opposed to intuitive processes. Accordingly, I will argue that τὸ διανοεῖσθαι is not identical with τὸ θεωρεῖν, nor a species of it.

Kosman is one who does not draw a distinction between human contemplating and discursive reasoning. His position may be observed when he describes what divine contemplation is not:

Aristotle’s god is not a scientist, nor a philosopher, and divine thought is not a cosmic form of ratiocination or brilliantly articulated scientific theory. For *theoria* is not theory; it is simply the principle of *awareness*..., the divine full self-manifesting and self-capturing of consciousness, of which scientific activity and philosophical speculation are to be sure particularly subtle forms, but of which the ruder and more incorporate activities of perception and nutrition are equally images... (Kosman 356).<sup>44</sup>

Although Kosman is not explicitly characterizing human contemplation, his comments about divine contemplation indicate his position. He is right, of course, that Aristotle’s God does not

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<sup>43</sup> Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will therefore translate τὸ θεωρεῖν as ‘contemplating,’ even in Smith’s texts

<sup>44</sup> Kosman, L.A. “What Does the Maker Mind Make?” *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima*. by Martha Nussbaum and Amelie Rorty. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, ed.

reason discursively in contemplation. But Kosman implies a contrast that is not sustainable: divine contemplation is not discursive, but human contemplation is. Thus, human and divine contemplating are different activities. This is why Kosman is forced to argue that human contemplation is divine in another way, for when humans engage in “scientific activity and philosophical speculation,” we are attempting to imitate God’s contemplation through a shared “principle of awareness” (Kosman 356). God is aware when God is contemplating, and when humans contemplate, even though it is discursive, it is *also* a manifestation of awareness. This then, is the connection between human and divine contemplation for Kosman. This is to deny the uniqueness of human contemplation, for there are many ways besides thinking to share the divine principle of awareness. Indeed, this principle of awareness that we have in discursivity is echoed throughout all of biology, for the “activities of perception and nutrition are equally images” of the divine’s principle of self-awareness (Kosman 356). Discursivity is not different in this sense from reproduction; both are vague reflections of perfect, divine awareness.

It therefore appears that Kosman conceives of τὸ θεωρεῖν and τὸ διανοεῖσθαι as identical in humans. This conception, however, is simply not faithful to the texts:

[t]hus it is that intuiting [τὸ νοεῖν] and contemplating [τὸ θεωρεῖν] decline through the decay of some inward part and are themselves impassible [ἀπαθές]. Discursive reasoning [τὸ διανοεῖσθαι], loving, and hating are affections not of mind, but of that which has mind, so far as it has it. That is why, when this vehicle decays, memory and love cease; they were activities not of mind, but of the composite which has perished; mind [νοῦς] is, no doubt, something more divine and impassible” (DA 408b18-31).

It is true that God’s contemplation is intuitive, but it is false that human contemplation is discursive. Aristotle has made this clear by drawing an important distinction between τὸ θεωρεῖν and τὸ διανοεῖσθαι. They differ to the same degree as that which is temporal and destructible differs from that which is eternal and impassible, for contemplation is a property of νοῦς, while discursive reasoning is a property of the composite; although the composite has νοῦς, νοῦς is not

exhausted by its instantiation in the composite.<sup>45</sup> This textual evidence by itself does not indicate how discursivity is related to contemplation, but it does make it clear that they are not identical.

### F. The Non-Identity of Τὸ Διανοεῖσθαι and Τὸ Νοεῖν

Kosman has made a mistake by identifying τὸ διανοεῖσθαι and τὸ θεωρεῖν; a similar error is to conflate τὸ διανοεῖσθαι and τὸ νοεῖν. This mistake is made in effect by those who translate τὸ διανοεῖσθαι and τὸ νοεῖν with the same word. For instance, when Aristotle mentions some of the capacities of soul, he names “the appetitive, the sensory, the locomotive, and the power of discursive reasoning [διανοητικόν]” (DA 414a32). But when Aristotle considers the possibility that some mental activity may be not an actuality of the body, he does not use the articular infinitive of διανοητικόν - ‘τὸ διανοεῖσθαι’ - but ‘τὸ νοεῖν’ (DA 403a3-5). This observation shows that Aristotle’s use of different words is consistent with our discovery that τὸ διανοεῖσθαι is a perishable function of the human composite, while τὸ νοεῖν is ‘divine’ and ‘impassible.’

This equivocation exposed in the previous paragraph is one thing, but there are places in which this equivocation shows up that make Aristotle simply illogical. I will reprint the relevant passage again, this time without my insertions of the Greek:

...thinking and reflecting decline through the decay of some inward part and are themselves impassible. Thinking, loving, and hating are affections not of thought, but of that which has thought, so far as it has it. That is why, when this vehicle decays, memory and love cease; they were activities not of thought, but of the composite which has perished; thought is, no doubt, something more divine and impassible (DA 408b18-31).

If there is really no philosophically important difference between τὸ διανοεῖσθαι and τὸ νοεῖν, then J.A. Smith, our present translator, is justified in translating both as ‘thinking.’ But even without an analysis of their philosophical uses in other contexts, this passage already announces a difference, namely, that one is passible while one is not. It is no doubt better to believe that Aristotle *purposely* used different words because he was attempting to pick out *distinct*

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<sup>45</sup> See section G.

processes. He repeats this distinction *DA* 414b18: “Certain kinds of animals possess...the power of discursive reasoning and intuiting [τὸ διανοητικόν τε καὶ νοῦς].”<sup>46</sup>

But if τὸ διανοεῖσθαι is a mental function that picks out neither passive nor active intuition of the forms, then what does the term signify? We have just observed Aristotle use the terms ‘διανοεῖται’ and ‘ὑπολαμβάνει’ together in *DA* 429a23-4, apparently as synonyms, and this is consistent with the position that I support, namely, that τὸ διανοεῖσθαι is Aristotle’s term for ‘discursive reasoning.’<sup>47</sup> This mental function is unique because it judges, which in turn gives rise to the possibility of truth and error. Aristotle makes this explicit when contrasting discursive reason and imagination:

...for perception of the special objects of sense is always free from error, and it found in all animals, while it is possible to reason discursively [διανοεῖσθαι] falsely as well as truly, and thought is found only where there is discourse of reason. For imagination is different from either perceiving or discursive thinking [διανοίας]... (*DA* 427b11-14).

Διανοίας not only judges, but is “the mind inasmuch as it reasons, argues, or orders.” (Kal 9).

This is simply the mind insofar as it engages in an explicit or implicit syllogism, a process which Aristotle analyzes at length: deduction is an argument in which, certain things being laid down, something other than these necessarily comes through them” (*Topics* 100a25-6).<sup>48</sup> There are, broadly, two types of syllogisms based on the nature of the premises: “It is a demonstration, when the premises from which the deduction starts are true and primitive...and it is a dialectical deduction if it reasons from reputable opinions” (*Topics* 100a26). Demonstrations are the sort of

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<sup>46</sup> While *DA* 414b18 is in fact another instance of Aristotle’s distinction, it is important to note that this is a different use of ‘νοῦς;’ indeed, Aristotle uses it in two ways. Sometimes, it is a general term for ‘mind’ or ‘intellect’ – the seat of all intellectual powers. In this broader sense, τὸ διανοεῖσθαι is merely one of the functions or affections of νοῦς, as in *DA* 429a23-4: “Thus that in the soul which is called thought [νοῦς] (by thought I mean that whereby the soul thinks and judges [λέγω δὲ νοῦν ὃ διανοεῖται καὶ ὑπολαμβάνει ἢ ψυχῆ]) is, before it thinks [νοεῖν], not actually any real thing.” This contrasts with his use of νοῦς in *DA* 414b18, where τὸ νοῦς is a capacity distinguished from τὸ διανοητικόν. This passage, then, must be interpreted as a reference to the passive intuitive capacity of νοῦς.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Kal, p. 9, especially fn. 3 & 6.

<sup>48</sup> *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Volume One. Bollington Series LXXI.2; Princeton University Press, 1984 ed. *Topics* translated by W.A. Pickard-Cambridge

sylogisms that will be the concern of lovers of wisdom, since starting with true premises, they will, if sound, end with true conclusions about the subject matter. The conclusion of the dialectician's argument, however, will only be true insofar as the reputable opinions are true.

### G. The Mind Insofar as it Makes

But there is still a mystery here; Aristotle has said both that the substance of νοῦς perishes qua instantiated substance, but itself is impassible. I argue that the best explanation of this doctrine occurs in the infamous 'maker mind' passage. In Aristotle's discussion of perception, he had said that the mind's change from being potentially all the forms to intuiting itself requires not one but two actualizations:

[b]ut we must now distinguish different senses in which things can be said to be potential or actual; at the moment we are speaking as if each of these phrases had only one sense. We can speak of something as a knower either as when we say that man is a knower... And there is a man who is already reflecting – he is a knower in actuality and in the most proper sense is knowing, e.g., this A (DA 417a22-30).

But how are these changes affected? This difficulty arises because of Aristotle's doctrine of change; for Aristotle, change is always movement from potentiality to actuality, and such movement can only be accounted for by something already actual. That is, what is moving is never a self mover, but is moved by a prior actuality.

So we may have anticipated that there is more to the story, for Aristotle has thus far not described this prior actuality that necessarily exists. Finally, Aristotle addresses this issue in III.5; there he says that we need

a cause which is productive in the sense that it makes [all the particulars included in the class]... And in fact mind [νοῦς], as we have described it, is what it is by virtue of becoming all things, while there is another which is what it is by virtue of making all things (DA 430a12).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> It is first worth noting that when the mind in one sense 'becomes all things' (τῷ πάντα γίνεσθαι) and in another 'makes all things' (τῷ πάντα ποιεῖν), the reference to 'all things' cannot be simply everything that exists. As Kosman notes, "the phrase is prefaced by the qualification *hekastō genei*, which makes clear that what we are talking about is what makes things be of a particular sort" (Kosman 344). And in particular, we are talking about



Aristotle's reference to  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  in the first sense is by now familiar as a central theme of Aristotle's philosophy of mind, for the mind becomes what it is by becoming the intellectual forms that it intuitively grasps. But what exactly is this making mind? Aristotle says that it is a state [ $\epsilon\acute{\xi}\tau\iota\varsigma$ ], and suggests an analogy to the state of light because making mind and light do the same job, "for in a sense light makes potential colors actual colors" (DA 430a16-7). Furthermore,  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  "in this sense of it is separable, impassible, unmixed, since it is in its essential nature activity" (DA 430a 17).

Previously, Aristotle has said that  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  is a substance "born in us" - that is, in the composite substance (DA 408b18). In this, he is in accord with any substance dualist<sup>50</sup> who argues that the mind and the body are separable.

But Aristotle is not saying that the making mind is merely conceptually separable from the composite, but genuinely separable; it keeps existing even when the composite and the composite's passive and discursive mind perishes: "[w]hen separated it is alone just what it is,

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things that are potentially thought, and the only candidate here is the intellectual forms. So Kosman proposes that Aristotle meant that the making mind "makes everything that is potentially thought actually thought" (Kosman 344).<sup>50</sup> Aristotle, by arguing for  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ , argues for a substance that is not reducible to body. Despite this, it is not always accepted that Aristotle is a dualist. For instance, Charles Kahn ("Aristotle on Thinking." *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*. Edited by Martha Nussbaum and Amelie Rorty. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, ed.) argues that Aristotle's doctrine stands outside of "the Cartesian curse of mind-body opposition with all the baffling paradoxes and philosophical blind alleys that this antithesis gives rise to" (Kahn 359). Kahn admits that Aristotle's claim that "*nous* has no bodily organ and hence that the faculty of intellect...[because it] is not only logically distinct by essentially separable from the body...is an embarrassment to many of Aristotle's modern admirers, who fear that it commits him to some form of Cartesian dualism" (Kahn 360). But Kahn believes that Aristotle's position is different because Descartes "conceives [the *cogito*] as carried out by a thinking being who might not have a body at all; whereas Aristotle would have recognized such self-awareness...as an essentially embodied act" (Kahn 363). Kahn is right to notice that this is a genuine difference, but is this also a *relevant* difference? Recall that sympathizers of Aristotle's philosophy of mind were specifically afraid of running into the 'baffling paradoxes' of Cartesian dualism (Kahn is obviously thinking of the interaction problem - perhaps exclusively). Kahn believes that noticing the aforementioned difference is supposed to bring relief to these sympathizers. But alas, it does not. The other parts of soul besides  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  are related to the body as sight to the eye, but what is the relation of  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  to the other parts of the soul and/or to the body? Aristotle's non-answer leads Kahn to say that he does "not see that there is any genuine resolution for this tension within Aristotle's account of the *psuche*," although we might gain some sympathy by chalking up this "lack of unity in Aristotle's account" to the "complex, paradoxical structure of the human condition" (Kahn 361-2). This is really quite a statement. Kahn initially says that Aristotle is above the hopeless dualist paradoxes, but a page later he says very clearly that Aristotle is right in the middle of that fray. Although I am not here arguing against dualism, I am merely pointing out that Aristotle has the same challenges as any substance dualist, despite whatever differences his doctrine of  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  might have.

and this above is immortal and eternal (we do not remember because, while this is impassible,<sup>51</sup> passive νοῦς is perishable)” (DA 430a24-5). Aristotle seems to be changing his story about νοῦς slightly here. In DA 408b, he very clearly states that passive mind – that is, the mind that intuits the intelligible forms and thus become them – is impassible:

[t]hus it is that intuiting [τὸ νοεῖν] and contemplating [τὸ θεωρεῖν] decline through the decay of some inward part and are themselves impassible [ἀπαθές]. Discursive reasoning [τὸ διανοεῖσθαι], loving, and hating are affections not of mind, but of that which has mind, so far as it has it. That is why, when this vehicle decays, memory and love cease; they were activities not of mind, but of the composite which has perished; mind [ὁ νοῦς] is, no doubt, something more divine and impassible (DA 408b18-31).

Just as clearly, however, here in III.5 passive mind perishes with the composite, while only active, making mind is impassible. The best explanation here is to note that in 408b, τὸ διανοεῖσθαι is an affection of the composite in which νοῦς resides, while τὸ νοεῖν and τὸ θεωρεῖν are divine affections because they are affections of νοῦς proper. By the time Aristotle gets to 430a, he simply seems to believe that it is more sensible to think of τὸ νοεῖν as an affection of the composite also. This latter doctrine is in accord with *Metaphysics* 1072b22-24, where τὸ νοεῖν is not divine specifically because it is passive.

But as noted, there are two actualizations here; the second is when mind intuits itself in contemplation. So what affects *this* change? It seems that making mind also is responsible for this actualization. Since making mind is “in its essential nature activity,” Aristotle calls its knowing actual knowing (DA 430a19-21). He says that

[a]ctual knowledge [ἡ κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐπιστήμη] is identical with its object: *in the individual*, potential knowledge is in time prior to actual knowledge, but absolutely it is not prior even in time. *It does not sometimes think and sometimes not think*. When separated, it is alone just what it is, and this above is immortal and eternal...” (DA 430a20-24, my italics).

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<sup>51</sup> The Revised Oxford Translation has ‘impossible,’ which is a typo. The Greek word is ‘ἀπαθές,’ which means ‘impassible.’

Actual knowledge is thus considered in two senses: as it exists ‘in the individual,’ and as it exists ‘absolutely.’ Both kinds of actual knowledge are properly described as active intellectual intuiting, since actual knowledge is ‘identical with its object.’ But there are also important differences. Actual knowledge *in the individual* 1) is occasional: it sometimes is actual and sometimes not because the mind does not continually intuit itself; we have to eat and sleep, after all. And 2), actual knowledge in the individual is obviously posterior to potential knowledge. 3), it perishes; this is why Aristotle says that “contemplating [τὸ θεωρεῖν] decline[s] through the decay of some inward part and [is itself] impassible [ἀπαθές]” (DA 408b18).

But *absolute* actual knowledge is none of those things. It is 1) continual, because its essential nature is activity, 2) prior to potential knowledge, and 3) impassible: “[w]hen separated it is alone just what it is, and this above is immortal and eternal” (DA 430a24-5). Making mind, therefore, is mind that is eternally active, separable, and divine, posited for the sake of accounting for both actualizations of the mind, for “without this, nothing intuit[s] [voεῖ]” (DA 430a25). This is why Aristotle is able to say both that νοῦς perishes and that it does not perish; it is because sometimes he is speaking of actual knowledge as it exists in the individual (i.e. the composite) and sometimes he means absolute actual knowledge.

### **H. Traditional Translations, Traditional Problems, New Solutions**

I began this analysis by noting some apparent problems with Aristotle’s statement that “God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are” (*Meta* 1072b24), namely, the apparent temporality, discursivity, and reliance on images that characterize the human mind and that are all the opposite features of the divine mind. These features of human thinking would seem to exclude the possibility that humans are ever in the same state as God. I will now show

how these traditional problems dissolve by attending to the proper translations of τὸ νοεῖν, τὸ διανοεῖσθαι, and τὸ θεωρεῖν.

First, I will simply note that the concern that human thinking is discursive while God's thinking is intuitive has already been answered; human contemplation is an intuitive activity that is completely distinct from discursive activity. Second, there is the problem that God contemplates eternally while human contemplation is temporal. Aristotle explicitly addresses this issue in *DA* 408b18-31. Aristotle is clear that τὸ διανοεῖσθαι will perish with the composite man unlike τὸ νοεῖν and τὸ θεωρεῖν; the latter functions belong to a person only indirectly; properly speaking, they are affections of νοῦς. The composite, however, only participates in νοῦς, and so τὸ νοεῖν and τὸ θεωρεῖν are affections of the composite only insofar as the composite has νοῦς. Νοῦς is an independent substance that is not exhausted by its instantiation in the composite. This is reconcilable with the eternity of νοῦς because τὸ διανοεῖσθαι is not an affection of νοῦς, but of the man who has νοῦς. ('insofar as he has it'). Thus the question of the eternity of νοῦς is easily answered by attending to the distinction between τὸ νοεῖν and τὸ διανοεῖσθαι.

A final barrier to my thesis that human contemplation is like divine contemplation is that while God never contemplates in images (i.e. phantasms), the possession of images is a necessary condition for thinking in the human soul: "[t]o the thinking soul images serve as if they were contents of perception... That is why the soul never thinks without an image" (*DA* 431a15-17). There can be no mental activity for human beings unless we first perceive; in this sense, our mind is dependent on an initial contact with the external world. Usually, however, when we think, we are not standing in front of our object. This kind of direct perception, however, is not necessary because of our ability to recall images of the particulars. Comportment

toward images, then, is a substitute for comportment toward particulars, which is why ‘images serve as if they were contents of perception.’

Charles Kahn explains Aristotle’s reasoning about phantasms as a logical consequence of his analysis of the conditions of a composite existence:

In order for [any minimally rational train of thought] to take place the first condition – call it condition A – is empirical consciousness or sentience, what human beings share with animals... Sentience in the subjective side of *aisthesis*... The second condition, Condition B, is the specific capacity of *nous*, access to the noetic domain... The requirement of phantasms is a direct consequence of Condition A, our existence as sentient animals. As sentient, embodied beings, we cannot think even of *noeta*, intelligible objects, except by way of phantasms, the hylomorphic basis of our thought... (Kahn 362).<sup>52</sup>

Kahn correctly recognizes that νοῦς is of divine origin, and that contemplating itself is not essentially tied to images. This means that God, who is not bound by Condition A, does not need images in order to contemplate. So while human contemplation is necessarily tied to phantasms, it is not because of the nature of intelligible objects. Rather, it is because as hylomorphic beings, our having of intelligible objects is necessarily dependent on specific acts of passive intuition. Kahn therefore believes that the way that humans have intelligible objects is a consequence of our embodiment and that we ‘collect’ the forms one by one. If God’s contemplation can be taken to be complete and eternal possession of the noetic domain, then God’s contemplation will be in essence different from human contemplation.

Once again, we have a difficulty that can be cleared up by attending to Aristotle’s complex vocabulary. What Aristotle *actually* says is that “[i]mages serve as objects of perception to the soul undertaking discursive reasoning” (τῆ διανοητικῆ).<sup>53</sup> Kahn’s position is that “Aristotle insist[s] that we cannot think without phantasms...” (Kahn 362). In itself, this statement is true,

<sup>52</sup> Kahn, Charles. “Aristotle on Thinking.” *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima*. Edited by Martha Nussbaum and Amelie Rorty. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, ed.

<sup>53</sup> This is my translation of “τῆ δὲ διανοητικῆ ψυχῆ τὰ φαντάσματα οἷον αἰσθήματα ὑπάρχει...” (DA 431a15)

but it is true in a way that Kahn does not even realize, for he, no less than Kosman, assumes that ‘thinking’ is just a general way to describe the activity of the mind and the mind’s possession of intelligible objects. As I have argued, there is an important philosophical distinction between τὸ διανοεῖσθαι and τὸ θεωρεῖν; the first term is Aristotle’s term for (discursive) thinking, but the second picks out active intuiting of intelligible objects. What Aristotle does *not* say is that active intuiting in humans, i.e. contemplating, depends on images. But since the thesis that discursive thinking was divine was never under consideration, nothing Aristotle says in *DA* III.7 indicates that human and divine contemplation are essentially different.<sup>54</sup>

### I. The Life of Contemplation

My analysis of Aristotle’s cognitive psychology has been in the interest of discovering the meaning of his divinity thesis. I have found that when Aristotle praises the life of the activity of the intellect as divine, he means to exclude τὸ νοεῖν and τὸ διανοεῖσθαι, because they are affections of the composite. Τὸ θεωρεῖν is divine, and although it is divine because it is activity of a divine substance and because it imitates God’s activity, it is divine primarily because it is the same activity in which God engages. My conclusion that discursive reasoning does not constitute the life of the intellect may seem odd; one reason that Aristotle’s claim that the life according to the intellect is the highest life is plausible is the oft-recognized pleasure of engaging in discursive reasoning with others.

But this is not to say that τὸ διανοεῖσθαι or τὸ νοεῖν have *no* value. It’s just that the value that they have is primarily derivative because they are good insofar as they make possible the life of contemplation. In body/soul composites, Aristotle believes that contemplation is dependent on

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<sup>54</sup> Although in the next sentence Aristotle says that “the soul never thinks [νοεῖν] without an image. Kal also notices this abnormality, as says that in this passage “Aristotle uses the term νοεῖν in the place of διανοεῖσθαι.” His conclusion is that “The terminology, therefore, can only help us to some degree” (*On Intuition and Discursive Reasoning in Aristotle* 114fn6). I disagree with Kal slightly here: I think that Aristotle has always been consistent with his terminology for different types of thinking. A better explanation is that τὸ διανοεῖσθαι is never conjugated.

thinking. This is because thinking is the process through which the soul comes to possess knowledge, and contemplation depends on the soul being in a state of knowledge before it contemplates. As Aristotle says,

...there are two kinds of actuality corresponding to knowledge [ἐπιστήμη] and to reflecting [τὸ θεωρεῖν]. It is obvious that the soul is an actuality like knowledge; for both sleeping and waking presuppose the existence of soul, and of these waking corresponds to reflecting, sleeping to knowledge possessed but not employed, and knowledge of something is temporally prior (*DA* 412a22-26).

In equal measure, thinking is dependent on passive intuition, for before the soul thinks or judges, it must first intuit (*DA* 429a23-4). So it is easy to see how passive intuiting also has derivative value.

It may be thought that this conflicts with Aristotle's famous words at the opening of the *Metaphysics* that "All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves." (980a21-22). Aristotle is clear here that perception is loved in part for itself, which perhaps implies that thinking and intellectual intuiting are too. I suggest this possibility: passive intuiting and thinking may be goods in themselves *and also* derivative goods if they are good in the same way as courage, for example. In one sense, courage is loved for its own sake; in another sense, it is loved because it contributes to the life of political flourishing. The same may be true with discursive reasoning: in a sense it is loved because of itself. In another, it is loved because it makes contemplation possible.

I have removed two major barriers to properly understanding Aristotle's divinity thesis by showing how it is possible to live a divine life in the context of a human life (Chapter 1) and how human contemplation can be understood as a divine activity (Chapter 2). There is a further problem, however, because if it turns out that God contemplates only God's own mind to the

exclusion of the intelligible forms, then our former worry about the qualitative difference between human and divine contemplation will be reestablished. What, then, is the nature of God's τὸ θεωρεῖν?



## Chapter Three: The Nature of Divine Contemplation

### Chapter Summary

- A. *Introduction.* There are two rival models about the nature of God's cognition – the self-contemplation model and the omniscience model. This is an important argument because my contrast between Aristotle and Kant depends on the notion that Aristotle's God's contemplation is of the same kind as human contemplation.
- B. *The Meaning of the Self-Contemplation Model.* The self-contemplation model, here explained by Oehler, holds that when God thinks, God's only object is itself. According to Oehler, this is what Aristotle means when he says in reference to God that "Its thinking is a thinking on thinking." Thus, God is not aware of the world in any way.
- C. *Traditional Arguments for the Self-Contemplation Model.*
- D. *Traditional Arguments for the Omniscience Model.* Norman and George make the case that God's contemplation is of God's mind, but God's mind is not content-less; it is constituted by the forms of the world, and hence, God's contemplation amounts to omniscience.
- E. *Does Omniscience Compromise God's Ontological Status as the Highest Being?* Oehler's argument depends on three presuppositions, the first of which is that God's contemplation cannot be of the forms, because that would make the forms ontologically prior to God, which cannot be the case for a perfect being. I argue that the ontological priority of the universe only holds for human contemplation.
- F. *Does Omniscience Contradict Immutability?* Oehler also believes that if God is omniscient, then God's thoughts would be in flux, contradicting Aristotle's clear belief that God is immutable. But I point out that there are two interpretations of omniscience – historical and nomological – and only historical omniscience would contradict God's immutability.
- G. *Conclusion*

## A. Introduction

I argued in Chapter 1 that flourishing by contemplating requires the full devotion of a single life, and that only those with certain mental endowments flourish by living this life. Since this life is divine, anyone fit to live it has a divine nature. In Chapter 2, I characterized contemplation as active intellectual intuiting; it is intuiting because it is simple apprehension and affection, and it is intellectual because what it intuits are the intellectual forms, and it is active because the mind intuits itself since the mind just is the intellectual forms. Furthermore, I suggested, although I did not argue, that this is the very nature of God's activity; that argument constitutes the present chapter.

My interpretation of human and divine contemplation as active intellectual intuiting fits the relevant texts easily. For instance, Aristotle says that

And mind is *active* when it *possesses* its object. Therefore...[it] is the divine element which thought seems to contain, and the act of contemplation [θεωρία] is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God *is* in a better state (*Meta* 1072b23-26).

Aristotle seems to believe that we are sometimes in the state in which God is, although our version of it is incomplete in two ways: we are not always in it, and it is of inferior quality. This seems to imply that God is omniscient, since God would be contemplating *all* the forms *eternally*.

## B. The Meaning of the Self-Contemplation Model

My claim that Aristotle's God is omniscient, however, is controversial. Indeed, it is more common to believe that for Aristotle, God's contemplation is of God's own mind *instead of* the universe and its forms. The primary textual evidence for this position, henceforth called the self-contemplation model, seems to be this statement of God's mental activity, often translated this

way: "...its thinking is a thinking on thinking" (*Meta* 1074b33-34). Armed with this quote, many commentators insist that Aristotle is suggesting that God intuitively knows only God's own mind to the exclusion of the universe and its contents. Klaus Oehler, for instance, believes that this quote "clearly excludes from the Prime Mover any knowledge of something which is not itself. This appears to exclude from the Prime Mover all knowledge of the world" (Oehler 501).<sup>55</sup>

It is possible to believe that the self-contemplation model is doomed from the start since it seems to undermine Aristotle's notable ethical claim that human beings *should* aspire to the contemplative life of God: "one ought so far as possible to act as an immortal and do everything with a view to living in accordance with what is highest in oneself..." (*NE* 1177b30-33). And Aristotle seems to indicate that this is not only an ideal, but one that may actually be achieved: "God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are" (*Meta* 1072b24). In other words, the self-contemplation model may be at odds with Aristotle's 'divinity thesis,' which seems to indicate that Aristotle did believe that some human beings actually participate in the same activity in which God does.

Rolf George criticizes the self-contemplation model along these lines:<sup>56</sup> "there are...an embarrassingly large number of passages inconsistent with this interpretation" (George 62).<sup>57</sup>

The most important contradiction is found in "*Nicomachean Ethics* X, where the summum bonum of human life is said to be contemplation identified as divine activity" (George 63).

Richard Norman diagnoses the same problem with the self-contemplation model: "the activity of

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<sup>55</sup> Oehler, Klaus. "Aristotle on Self-Knowledge." *Proceedings of the American Philosophy Society* 118 (1974): 493-506.

<sup>56</sup> Although this is not his only criticism. His other more substantial criticism will also be worth examining.

<sup>57</sup> George, Rolf. "An Argument for Divine Omniscience in Aristotle." *Aperion* 22 (1984): 61-74.

It should be noted that the textual criticisms are not the main theme of George's article. His main criticisms are centered on accusations of mistranslations of certain Greek passages.

the Prime Mover is the summum bonum of human life. To suppose that in making this the ideal Aristotle is urging men to rapturous self-admiration is as false as it is ludicrous” (Norman 72).<sup>58</sup>

Although I ultimately will join George and Norman in criticizing Oehler, I do not share their belief that the self-contemplation model is ruled out simply by observing Aristotle’s ethical ideals. This is because there is another way to take the divinity thesis that can be derived from a passage from *De Anima*:

[the nutritive soul’s] functions are reproduction and the use of food; for it is the most natural function in living things...to produce another thing like themselves – an animal to produce an animal, a plant a plant – in order that they may partake of the everlasting and divine in so far as they can; for all desire that, and for the sake of that they do whatever they do in accordance with nature (*DA* 415a26-415b1).

According to one possible interpretation of the divinity thesis, when Aristotle claims that human contemplation is divine, he means only that human contemplation is our best attempt to approximate the activity of the divine. Human contemplation is in this respect the same kind of activity as reproduction, because it is rooted in a desire to ‘partake in’ the divine, but the activity itself is not divine. This is because God’s contemplation is only of God’s own thoughts; we humans, however, contemplate the world and the forms and essences that it contains. Thus, human contemplation is only divine in the sense that it is the manifestation of a desire to be like God, much like an animal produces an animal in an attempt to participate in the eternal nature of the divine. Since neither model of God’s contemplative life is ruled out by the texts, we must seek a resolution elsewhere.

### **C. Traditional Arguments for the Self-Contemplation Model**

Klaus Oehler distinguishes two general types of interpretation of God’s activity. They are ...the formal and the material. The material type regards the self-knowledge of the Prime Mover as one which, in thinking itself, also refers to the idea of being...so that his self-thought also, indirectly, thinks the world. The formal type takes the self-thinking of the

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<sup>58</sup> Norman, Richard. “Aristotle’s Philosopher God.” *Phronesis* 44 (1989): 1-29.

Prime Mover as a sign of the self-reference of the thought, however self-reference may be understood (Oehler 493).

What these rival interpretations have in common is a shared emphasis on the reflexivity of God's thinking. Reflexivity is undeniable, given that Aristotle's God is thought that thinks itself. The difference therefore is not found in whether one believes that God's thinking is reflexive, but rather the degree to which it is. On the material interpretation, the reflexivity of God's thought is weaker, since it also references the world. The formal model takes reflexivity in the stronger sense, since God only thinks of God's own self. Oehler plans to argue for the self-contemplation model by showing that Aristotle meant God's reflexivity in the stronger sense, while human thinking implies reflexivity in the weaker sense.

Oehler first focuses on a different relationship than reflexivity, namely, identity. There is a relation of identity between the unenmattered objects of thought and the mind which has received them. Before being known, the intelligible forms are only potential objects of thought, since they exist as enmattered in some particular substance and do not exist in anyone's mind: "For in the case of objects which involve no matter each of the objects is only potentially present" (*DA* 430a7). The intelligible forms exist, but in a potential form. They are actualized only when they are intuited by a mind. When they exist as unenmattered and actualized in the mind, they constitute the mind, because the mind is nothing actual before the reception of the intelligible forms: "...thought is in a sense potentially whatever is thinkable, though actually it is nothing until it has thought[.] What it thinks must be in it just as characters may be said to be on a writing-table on which as yet nothing actually stands written" (*DA* 429b31-430a2). Since the mind just is the forms which it has received, it follows that "what thinks and what is thought are identical" (*DA* 430a4).

Although Aristotle names an identity relation between the human mind and the forms constituting it, Oehler cautions that this is not identity simpliciter because intelligible forms that exist in the mind are a sort of reflection of the intelligible forms in the world. Thus there is an “epistemological simultaneity of knowledge and the known...[but there is still a] lack of ontological simultaneity between knowledge and reality” (Oehler 496). Nevertheless, this epistemological identity is significant because of the role it plays in self-reference, for it is through our perception (whether sensible or intellectual) of objects that we are aware of ourselves.

But what is important to note in the case of human beings is that “the real function of mental acts is understood by Aristotle to be intentional, not reflexive,” and thus “their self-reference can only be accidental or secondary” (Oehler 497). The idea is that our thinking and perceiving makes it possible to be aware of ourselves. However, this is merely a by-product of the perception of the object: “But evidently knowledge and perception and opinion and understanding have always something else as their object, and themselves only by the way” (*Meta* 1074b36). Or, as Oehler says bluntly, “in thinking an intelligible form thought may ‘on the side’ be aware of its own relation to itself” (Oehler 497). So it is true in the case of human beings that self-reflexive thought refers not only to itself but to its object, for its reflexivity is built upon intentionality. As Oehler sees it, this is to be contrasted with the way the divine mind works: “the divine Mind knows itself not incidentally *but as its only object*, whereas the human mind knows itself in so far as it is conscious of its object” (Oehler 498, my italics). The divine mind, according to Oehler, simply cannot have this two-fold relation of intentionality toward the forms of the world on the one hand, and consciousness of itself through that intentionality on the other,

for intentionality implies having an object, and having an object implies that the thinking was actualized by the object:

...the object of [the Prime Mover's] thought, which activated it, would have a higher ontological status than it; and, since this object could be something of little value, the activity of thought would not be the best possible. The Nus of the Prime Mover, since it is the most powerful and most divine...and the object of its thought is not just anything but something which confirms its ontological status. Hence it can only be itself...In contrast to human thought about thinking the thought of the Prime Mover is not just reflexive 'on the side' but has no other object than itself (Oehler 500).

Reflexivity is therefore of two kinds. There is reflexivity in the weak sense, which is the reflexivity of any mental content built on intentionality, such that reflexivity is through having an object. The mental capacity, whether it be thought or perception, becomes aware of itself. As Oehler points out, this seems to be the way of all human reflexivity. But according to him, this cannot be the manner of God's thinking, for if God thought the essences of the universe, then God's thought would be actualized by something prior to it, and hence of a higher ontological status. But Aristotle is clear that nothing has a higher ontological status than God, and so we must conclude that God's manner of self-referential thinking is quite unlike the incidental self-referential thinking of humans. It is self-referential because it is its own object – itself.

#### **D. Traditional Arguments for the Omniscience Model**

Richard Norman gives what Oehler would characterize as a material interpretation of the reflexivity of the thinking of Aristotle's God, since Norman advances the position that in thinking God's self, God also thinks the world. Norman wishes to argue that God's mental activity is of the same general kind as ours insofar as it contemplates the world: "when Aristotle refers to the Prime Mover with the phrase *auton noei* [it thinks itself] he wishes to indicate simply that activity of abstract thought in which humans also engage" (Norman 71). This is, therefore, the other way to take the divinity thesis, for on this interpretation, when Aristotle says

that the human intellect is divine, he means that the human intellect engages in the same kind of activity as the Prime Mover.

The heart of Norman's interpretation is his notion that Aristotle diagnoses two kinds of thinking: "In the first sort of thinking, the intellect takes in the forms and, being itself mere potentiality, it is actualized by becoming those forms. And it is now capable of performing the second sort of thinking; having become *ta noeta* is it now able to think itself" (Norman 65). Norman is relying on the same text from the *De Anima* (III.4) that Oehler does; furthermore, their beginnings of their interpretations of the text does not differ. Mind is nothing but pure potential before it encounters the intelligible forms. Before the encounter, the mind and the forms have nothing in common with the significant exception that the mind is the forms potentially.

One point of difference with Oehler is that Norman makes much of what the mind does after this the reception of the forms. He quotes Aristotle's analysis:

When thought has become each thing in the way in which a man who actually knows is said to do so (this happens when he is able to exercise the power on his own initiative), its condition is still one of potentiality, but in a different sense from the potentiality which proceeded the acquisition of knowledge by learning or discovery; and thought is able to think itself (*DA* 429b6-9).

When a person comes to know anything (in the sense of having knowledge or having a skill), her mind must have been potentially that thing. For example, if she comes to know how to do algebra, it proves that her mind was potentially the skill of algebra before the knowledge acquisition; after the acquisition she actually knows how to do algebra. However, when she is playing tennis, her knowledge of algebra is still potential in a sense, even though it has been actualized; it is potential because she is actually not using it. There are thus two senses of potentiality and two of actuality. First, there is the pure potential that obtained at the time when she was ignorant of algebra. This is a different sort of potentiality that obtains when she



possesses knowledge of algebra but is currently not using it. Therefore, in this stage potentiality and actuality are both present. Only in cases when she is currently doing algebra does pure actuality obtain, for not only does she actually possess it, but she is actually using it.

There are thus two movements – one from pure potentiality to a mixture of potentiality and actuality, and one in which the possessed-but-latent knowledge is actualized. Norman takes these two movements to symbolize Aristotle two-fold analysis of thinking ( $\tau\acute{o}$  νοεῖν): “the first kind of thinking is dependent upon something external – it is *paschein*. . . whereas the second is entirely self-sufficient and *nous* that thinks itself” (Norman 65). Thinking in the first sense is like the movement of our math student from ignorance to knowledge. This movement is passive from the perspective of the mind, for the mind is affected by a teacher. In the same way, the mind, when it becomes an intelligible form, is affected by that form. But thinking in the second stage is different, since the mind “is already identical with [to *noeta*] and therefore thinks itself” (Norman 65). This is the case because the mind was nothing before its reception of the forms, and is thus constituted entirely of forms. Therefore when the mind contemplates, or thinks of forms, it is thinking itself. According to Norman this should be characterized as self-knowledge rather than self-contemplation, for “[m]ind thinks itself, because it thinks those *noeta* which it has become through the earlier kind of thinking” (Norman 65).

Norman uses this analysis to reconstruct the thinking of Oehler and other ‘formalists’ this way: “The PM thinks that which is best. The PM is that which is best. Therefore the PM thinks itself” (Norman 71). But according to Norman, this line of reasoning, if it can be said even to be Aristotle’s, need not be taken to mean that the forms of the world are external to God’s mind; what is it important for Aristotle is that God’s thinking is not like the movement from pure potentiality to a stage in which potentiality is mixed with actuality. If God’s mind were affected

this way, then the objects which affected God's mind are of higher worth, which as Oehler correctly pointed out cannot be the case. Rather, "the Prime Mover's thinking is entirely of the theoretic kind and not at all of the receptive kind" (Norman 69). So when Aristotle characterized God as thought that thinks itself, he is not identifying a third way of thinking unique to God, above and beyond the two-fold way of human thinking. Aristotle is simply saying that God's thinking is of the second kind, and entirely unmixed with the first kind. Human thinking becomes like divine thinking when it contemplates. This is why Aristotle says that "[d]ivinity...belongs to mind as actualization rather than to mind as potential, and 'theoretic' thought is what is pleasantest and best" (*Meta* 1072b). Just like the mind intuitively itself when contemplating the intelligible forms of the world which it is, so too the divine mind thinks itself when it thinks the objects of its mind, because the divine mind just is all of the intelligible forms of the world.

### **E. Does Omniscience Compromise God's Ontological Status as the Highest Being?**

Oehler characterizes his own model as 'formal,' since it characterizes the reflexivity of thought thinking itself in the stronger sense. That is, God's thinking has only God's self as its object, to the exclusion of any feature of the world. Following Norman, I have called this the 'self-contemplation' model, and it excludes the possibility of omniscience. Norman has given an argument that God is omniscient, since God, as pure thought thinking itself, is simply contemplating all the intelligible forms at once and for eternity. I want to give two considerations in favor of the omniscience model, both of which attack what are apparently the most important reasons that Oehler has for holding the 'self-contemplation' model. As I count them, Oehler holds two relevant presuppositions that make the self-contemplation necessary: 1) God's knowledge of the universe would compromise God's status as the highest being, and 2) God's

omniscience is incompatible with God's immutability. My responses to these concerns constitute sections E and F respectively.

Oehler's criticism of the omniscience model is in part based on concern that the perfect Being of God would be compromised if God were to know about the world: "the essences of the things in the world are of a lower rank than the essence of the First Being. Therefore, in spite of being the first to other beings, it does not know them by knowing itself: according to Aristotle, it must not even know them" (Oehler 502). If Aristotle's God were forced to contemplate the essences of the world, then his knowledge would be dependent on things in the world, and therefore God's ontological status would be degraded. But Aristotle regards God as a perfect Being, not ontologically dependent on anything: "We have to learn that for Aristotle the perfection of the First Being does not consist in knowing everything but in the freedom from the necessity to be obliged to know everything. The Divine Mind is so perfect that it can only know itself" (Oehler 502). Oehler believes that this follows from the insight that "according to Aristotle's assumptions the essences of things in the world are of a lower rank than the essence of First Being" (Oehler 502).

Oehler cites (but does not quote) a passage which he considers relevant from the *Eudemian Ethics* as support for his claim. There, Aristotle says that

according to this argument the virtuous man will not think of anything; for God's perfection does not permit of this, but he is too perfect to think of anything else beside himself. And the reason is that for us well-being has reference to something other than ourselves, but in his case he is himself his own well-being (*EE* 1245b16-18).

By citing this passage, Oehler implies that it supports his belief that God would be degraded if God's object were external to God. But the doctrine that Oehler is trying to reject - reflexivity in the weak sense - does not advance the position that the essences of the world are external to God. Indeed, Norman argues that the objects of God's thinking "cannot be any visible entities in the

external world. Therefore they must be invisible, purely mental entities – abstract matter-less noeta...Where and what are these noeta? They are in the mind, of course, and in fact they must be that mental stuff of which the mind is composed” (Norman 66).

What Oehler is right to worry about is that if God’s mind were actualized by external objects, then those intelligible forms would be ontologically prior to God’s mind. This is so because in this case, the intelligible forms would be able to exist without God’s mind (although not unenmattered), but God’s mind would not be able to exist without the intelligible forms. Certainly it is true that human contemplation always presupposes a time when the mind was actualized by the potential forms. And certainly, Oehler is right to make much of Aristotle’s doctrine of the primacy of reality over knowledge. But while reality is certainly primary over *human* thinking because *our* minds are actualized by something external to it in reality, Norman is not arguing that God’s mind is actualized by something else. What distinguishes divine from human thinking is that God’s contemplation, unlike human contemplation, never depends on previously being affected. There was, so to speak, never a time when God became acquainted with the forms through an act of passive intellectual intuiting.

Oehler seems to believe that this kind of thinking is not possible; in order to know the intelligible forms, they must be first actualized in the mind. This is just the doctrine of the primacy of reality over knowledge – knowledge depends on reality, but reality does not depend on knowledge. Let me attempt to reconstruct Oehler’s reasoning: ‘if thinking is thinking of the forms, then they must have been actualized in the mind previously. But this cannot be the case when it comes to God’s mind, for if God’s mind were actualized then it would not be the most perfect thing. Therefore God’s thinking is never of intelligible forms.’ But this rests on an important assumption, namely that the doctrine of the primacy of reality over knowledge would

extend also to God's knowledge. The world contains essences that are only potentially known by human cognizers. But actuality always precedes potentiality for Aristotle, and he is consistent about this even in the case of intelligence:

[s]pontaneity and chance are causes of effects which, though they might result from intelligence or nature, have in fact been caused by something accidentally. Now since nothing which is accidental is prior to what is *per se*, it is clear that no accidental cause can be prior to a cause *per se*. Spontaneity and chance, therefore, are posterior to intelligence and nature. Hence, however true it may be that the heavens are due to spontaneity, it will still be true that intelligence and nature will be prior causes of this universe and of many things in it besides (*Physics* 198a1).

In this context, he is talking about intelligence as a priori cause of the world; while I am not concerned with causes in this context, this does imply that divine intelligence is prior to the world. This contradicts Oehler's assumption that Aristotle's doctrine of the primacy of reality over knowledge can be extended to God's knowledge.

#### **F. Does Omniscience Contradict Immutability?**

In addition to this first argument concerning God's ontological status, Oehler argues that omniscience should be decided against on other grounds, namely, its incompatibility with God's immutability. If they are indeed incompatible, and God's immutability is not in question, then we will be back at the thesis that God's contemplation is only of God's own mind.

Oehler's present concern with omniscience is that Aristotle's arguments for God's immutability rule out any logical possibility that Aristotle's God is omniscient. He is forced into defending his position on this front because as even he points out, his argument against divine omniscience is not derived from decisive texts, for "Aristotle did not define the content of the Prime Mover's thought..." (Oehler 503). According to Oehler, therefore, Aristotle does not explicitly rule out omniscience. A main reason that Oehler is compelled to reject the omniscience model is not textual, then, but logical: "there are strong arguments for the logical incompatibility

of immutability and omniscience” (Oehler 502). Oehler’s textual analyses, therefore, do not directly attack the omniscience model; his arguments, rather, strengthen the cogency of Aristotle’s claim that the Unmoved Mover is immutable. It is only because he believes that immutability is incompatible with omniscience that omniscience must go: “It is not to be forgotten that Aristotle maintains and gives detailed reasons for the Prime Mover’s immutability but is very reticent about its knowledge and says nothing that might allow us to conclude that he wanted to claim omniscience for it” (Oehler 503). This objection depends, then, on whether omniscience is logically compatible with immutability, for if they are compatible, then on Oehler’s own admission, there is no reason why he cannot view God as omniscient since this possibility is not eliminated by any text.

Oehler has argued that the reflexivity of God’s thinking does not simultaneously reference the essences of the world. But Oehler realizes that his textual analysis has left logical space for the position that insists that reflexive thinking of God is indeed omniscient after all.

Oehler summarizes this allegedly mistaken view:

the Prime Mover’s self-knowledge would contain all the objects of *episteme*, [and] this means that the Prime Mover by thinking itself thinks the essences of all being and by that the structure of the world...[T]he reflexive thought of the Prime Mover makes reference to the world in such a way that in thinking itself it thinks the world, and hence...its self-knowledge is knowledge of everything (Oehler 502).

This allows the ‘erroneous’ commentators to reconcile God’s omniscience, that is, his knowledge of the forms and causes in the universe, with Aristotle’s notion of God as thought thinking itself. So if God’s knowledge of the world is constantly in flux, then God is mutable; Aristotle’s God, then, cannot be omniscient.

But what exactly does Oehler mean by ‘omniscience?’ We should be disappointed with Oehler’s lack of explanation here, for as George makes clear, there are at least two definitions of

omniscience. The first is articulated by Aquinas, who insisted that Aristotle “conceived of God as a creator who provisionally cares for his creation...[which] implies *nomological* and *historical* knowledge of the world” (George 61),<sup>59</sup> meaning that not only does God know the forms and causes of the world, but is acquainted with its particular, historical, and accidental features. This is to be contrasted with Averroes’ interpretation of Aristotle’s God who “has only *nomological* knowledge of the world...[because] he knows only the laws and forms of things, not individuals or their states” (George 61).

When Oehler complains that the doctrine of omniscience threatens to undermine the immutability of the Unmoved Mover, he never clarifies in which of the two senses he means ‘omniscience.’ This seems to be quite important, because if he means omniscience in Aquinas’ sense, he is right to worry, for if God is constantly caring about the details of the world, then God’ state of mind is constantly changing, and hence, so is God. George, however, rejects the possibility that God could have been omniscient in this way. In support, George cites Aristotle’s comment that God has no knowledge of things ‘in detail” (*Metaphysics* 982a10), which is to dismiss Aquinas’ contention that God knows the particulars of the world. Omniscience, if it is confined to nomological omniscience as Averroes holds, is compatible with immutability. God would in fact know everything about ‘the laws and forms of things,’ but since the laws and forms are immutable, God’s knowledge of them also would be immutable. That Oehler does not reject the latter version of omniscience is obvious, since he even approvingly references the argument against historical omniscience given by Averroes.<sup>60</sup> So we are left to conclude that Oehler is

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<sup>59</sup> It is not clear why George uses the phrase ‘nomological’ to describe one possible mode of omniscience, since that etymology implies that Aristotle’s God knows laws of some kind, which is false; on this model, God would know the forms of the world

<sup>60</sup> Oehler, page 502fn.

guilty of an equivocation by confusing nomological and historical omniscience.<sup>61</sup> Ruling out historical omniscience in no way testifies to any problems with nomological omniscience.

So despite the appearance that Oehler's doctrine is incompatible with the doctrine of the omniscience of the Unmoved Mover, there is conceptual space to unite them. This is so because even if we generally accept Oehler's analysis of reflexivity, there is still room to think of Aristotle's God as omniscient. Oehler, by contrast, believed that acceptance of reflexivity requires rejecting omniscience. By Oehler's own testimony, "Aristotle did not define the content of the Prime Mover's thought" (Oehler 503), and so if there is no conflict between nomological omniscience and immutability, and Aristotle's ethics and politics only make sense by positing an omniscient God, then interpreting Aristotle's God as omniscient is the best interpretation.

But there is still one potential objection from the formalist camp, namely, that Aristotle's comments seem to indicate that unchanging active contemplation of the intellectual forms is impossible. Lear observes that this is so because

if each higher-level activity of contemplating essence is indivisible, it would seem that, were God to be thinking the essences whose lower-level counterparts are found embodied in the world, he would have to think many distinct indivisible thoughts. It seems, however, that it is precisely because he thinks himself that his thought is not composite and does not change, as if he were to think the distinct parts of the whole" (Lear 303).

Lear's concern is that God or God's thought cannot change, and as Aristotle notes, "if [the object of thought were composite], thought would change in passing from part to part of the whole..." (*Meta* 1075a6). If contemplating the intellectual forms indicates change, then Oehler must be right to conclude that God does not contemplate forms at all, for God "thinks that which is most divine and precious, and it does not change" (*Meta* 1074b25-6). Hence, God thinks only himself. And there is a second problem here that is unique to my interpretation. We know that human

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<sup>61</sup> The only other possibility is that even nomological omniscience requires change, if the laws and forms must be thought one by one. However, it is difficult to believe that Aristotle meant to say this about God.



thought changes because “human thought...is thought of composite objects” (*Meta* 1075a7). If so, then there would be an essential difference between human and divine contemplation.

Lear addresses both problems at once by noting that the way in which humans are constrained to have the intellectual forms is significant. He argues that human contemplation is different, but *not* because we somehow have different objects; rather, the difference lies in the way in which humans are constrained to have these *same* objects or essences that God does:

[i]t is possible for us to think this essence, then think that essence: the essences found in the world would then be actually divided...And so it is at least possible for our contemplation to be of composites and to occur in some time and yet for it still to be true that both we and God are contemplating the same essences – in the one case as divided, in the other case as indivisible. Aristotle’s conception of God thinking himself would then be as rich as the conception of contemplating the world as a whole (Lear 305-6).

Since we encounter the essences in time, they are actually divisible; this is in accord with what Aristotle says. But for God, the essences, while actually divisible, are had all at once. Hence, while contemplation of the essence in time implies that thought changes insofar as it moved “from part to part of the whole” (*Meta* 1075a6), God already has them as a whole. Hence, it is not necessary to believe that God’s contemplation changes, even though this contemplation counts as divine omniscience:

[s]ince he thinks himself, the object of his thought is actually indivisible. It does not follow that his thinking bears no relation to the world of that his self-contemplation is barren. For the possibility lies open that God thinks the (essences embodied in the) world *as a whole* (Lear 305, my italics).

## **G. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I considered the merits of both the self-contemplation and omniscience models of God’s contemplation. I argued that Aristotle’s straightforward statements about God’s mental activity did not make either of these models obviously correct, although I noted that the burden of proof was on Oehler’s doctrine of divine self-contemplation. I then argued that Oehler’s position rested on two criticisms, namely that God could not be ontologically dependent

on the world, and that Aristotle would never have attributed mutability to God. Having found both ideas to be compatible with omniscience (or at least nomological omniscience), I reject Oehler's interpretation. This serves my interpretation about the divinity thesis that it is indeed possible for some humans to think God's thoughts.

## Chapter Four: The Origin of Kant's Doctrine of Non-Omniscience

### Chapter Summary

Overall Goal: In this chapter I explain Kant's epistemological commitments that lead him to his doctrine of kind non-omniscience. This argument, coupled with our conclusions from the first three chapters, has the effect of showing why Kant and Aristotle have incompatible doctrines of non-omniscience.

A. *Introduction*

B. *The Empiricists and the Quid Juris Problem.* Kant successfully criticizes the empiricists for being unable to explain the ground of the relation of conceptual representations to the object of which it is a representation.

C. *The Rationalists and the Quid Juris Problem.* Kant successfully criticizes the rationalists for being unable to explain how the doctrine of innate ideas can explain how any knowledge is our knowledge, rather than knowledge belonging to the 'implanter' of innate ideas.

D. *Creative Intuition and the Quid Juris Problem.* Kant makes it clear that the sort of spontaneity he is arguing for has nothing to do with the sort of spontaneity that creates its own object. Spontaneity in this sense is reserved for the divine intellect with intellectual intuition.

E. *Spontaneity, for the First Time.* I make clear how Kant's doctrine of spontaneity makes his epistemology different from all other epistemologies.

F. *Kantian Finitude*

## A. Introduction

In his correspondence with Marcus Herz, Kant describes a problem that

...I, as well as others, had failed to consider and which in fact constitutes the key to the whole secret of metaphysics, hitherto still hidden from itself. I asked myself this question: What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call representation to the object? (CK 10:130).<sup>62</sup>

He had previously worked on this problem, but without the rigor required by the complexity of the task: “[i]n my dissertation I was content to explain the nature of the intellectual representations in a merely negative way, namely, to state that they were not modifications of the soul brought about by the object” (CK 10:130-1).<sup>63</sup> Despite this, he was convinced that “[t]he sensuous representations present things as they appear, the intellectual representations present things as they are” (CK 10:130). It appears, then, that the pre-critical Kant believed that cognitions could be either sensible or intellectual. But now, he is concerned that since intellectual representations cannot be “given to us[,]...whence comes the agreement that they are supposed to have with objects...?” (CK 10:131). In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant finds the typical empiricist, rationalist, and idealist positions unable to explain this agreement. The purpose of this chapter is 1) to clarify the sense in which Kant believes that all previous attempts to answer the question of the ground of the relation of representation to object were insufficient (B, C, D) and 2) to show how Kant’s own solution is responsible for his doctrine of kind non-omniscience (E, F). Thus, the beginnings of Kant’s redefinition of finitude can be traced to his attempt to solve

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<sup>62</sup> *The Cambridge Edition to the Works of Immanuel Kant: Correspondence of Immanuel Kant*. Translated and edited by Arnulf Zweig. Cambridge University Press, 1998 ed.

<sup>63</sup> Whatever else is true about the differences between the epistemologies of Kant and Aristotle, we have a clear one here, for Aristotle believed that *to noien* describes a process in which the mind is affected by the intelligible form of the object. Thus, for Aristotle, there is no mystery about the relation of our representation of the object to the object itself. Even in Kant’s pre-critical period, he stated that this relation was not possible, for intellectual cognition was not brought about by affection. Now, he is moving on to a question that Aristotle’s cognitive psychology had obviated: ‘if there is no relation of affection, then how could the relation be grounded?’

the problem of the ground of the relation of conceptual representations to their putative objects that he had first raised in his letter to Herz (LH).

### B. The Empiricists and the *Quid Juris* Question

Kant returns to the question he raised in the LH some years later in the opening lines of the transcendental deduction (TD) of the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

[j]urists, when they speak of entitlements and claims, distinguish in a legal matter between the questions about what is lawful (*quid juris*) and that which concerns the fact (*quid facti*), and since they demand proof of both, they call the first, that which is to establish the entitlement or the legal claim, the deduction (A84/B116).<sup>64</sup>

In certain legal cases, a lawyer has to prove not only that *this* crime was committed, but that *this* sort of thing should count as a crime given the current law. And the second proof may be characterized as a deduction because the lawyer must show how the established law necessarily applies to the act in question, thus making clear why the act is an illegal act. In an epistemological context, it is possible merely to assume that the categories apply to objects; but with what right (*quid juris*) do we make this assumption? If we wish to deduce the right, we must show that our conceptual representations necessarily apply to objects; this is objective validity. This is the deduction that Kant has set out to give in the TD. I take it that this is another version of the question that Kant earlier asked in his letter to Marcus Herz - “What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call ‘representation’ to the object?” – because those questions may be elided without changing the meaning of either. The new form may be this: “*With what right do we believe that the relation between our representation and its putative object is grounded by necessity?*” In other words, do we have a right to assume that our representation is necessarily of its putative object? I will henceforth refer to this as the *quid juris* question.

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<sup>64</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated and Edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. *The Cambridge Edition to the Works of Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason*. Cambridge University Press, 1998 ed. All citations that include no reference to the title of the book are from the *Critique of the Pure Reason*.

At first glance, it seems odd that Kant frames the TD with the *quid juris* question, for the deduction is apparently directed at least partly at the empiricists, and Kant seems to imply both in the LH and in the TD that the empiricist is not obligated to answer this question:

[i]f a representation comprises only the manner in which the subject is affected by the object, then it is easy to see how it is in conformity with this object, namely, as an effect accords with its cause, and it is easy to see how this modification of our mind can represent something, that is, have an object. Thus the passive or sensuous representations have an understandable relation to objects, and the principles that are derived from the nature of the soul have an understandable validity for all things... (CK 10:130).

[w]e may make use of a multitude of empirical concepts without objection from anyone, and take ourselves to be justified in granting them a sense and a supposed signification even without any deduction, because we always have experience ready at hand to prove their objective reality (A84/B116).

For the empiricist, the object is the cause and our representation of it is the effect. This is the sort of relation that Kant believes that our intuition has to objects, and since Kant is clear that no transcendental deduction is necessary if the object is the cause and the representation is the effect (A93/B125), it is possible to believe that the empiricist is required merely to give an empirical deduction. An empirical deduction is simply a *quid facti* question: ‘From which of our particular experiences did this concept arise?’ (A85/B117).

But empiricism is not thereby a live option. Kant notices both in the LH and the TD that this is the relation with which the empiricist accounts for *all* representations, not just the sensible representations that Kant allows:

...the object [is not] the cause of our intellectual representations in the real sense (*in sensu reali*). 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... (CK 10:130).

[a]mong the many concepts, however, that constitute the very mixed fabric of human cognition, there are some that are also destined for pure use *a priori* (completely independently of all experience), and these always require a deduction of their entitlement, since...one must know how these concepts can be related to objects that they do not derive from any experience (A85/B117).

These quotes are both outlines of the Metaphysical Deduction and highlight the point of the MD, namely, that it is simply false that all of our ideas could be *a posteriori*; hence, an empirical deduction will not satisfy the *quid juris* question.

But empiricism has more problems than that it is not able to explain the acquisition of concepts. Kant mentions how both Locke and then Hume stand with regard to the *quid juris* question:

[t]he famous Locke, from neglect of this consideration, and because he encountered pure concepts of the understanding in experience, also derived them from this experience, and thus proceeded so inconsistently that he thereby dared to make attempts at cognitions that go far beyond experience (A95/B127).

Although it may be that Locke cannot account for how we acquire representations, Kant is concerned with a very different problem here. The problem is that even if Locke could explain how all concepts can be derived from experience, he still would not be able to explain how these concepts could be applied beyond experience. Locke assumes this, but *with what right?*

Hume shares a general commitment to empiricism with Locke, but Hume's empiricism is, according to Kant, more reflective; indeed, it is not stretching matters to say that Humean epistemology anticipated Kantian epistemology in an important way. It will be useful to recall that in the LH, dated 1772, Kant said that "...I, as well as others, had failed to consider...this question: What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call "representation" to the object?" (CK 10:130). Somewhere between 1772 and 1783 (the publication date of the *Prolegomena*), Kant must have realized that he hadn't said that quite right because Hume before him *had* addressed something like the *quid juris* question:

[t]he question was not, whether the concept of cause is right, useful, and, with respect to all cognition of nature, indispensable, for this Hume had never put in doubt; it was rather whether it is thought through reason *a priori*, and in this way has an inner truth independent of all experience, and therefore also a much more widely extended use

which is not limited merely to objects of experience...The discussion was only about the origin of this concept, not its indispensability in use; if the former were only discovered, the conditions of its use and the sphere in which it can be valid would already be given (*Pro* 4:258-259).<sup>65</sup>

Hume asks: ‘With what right do we utilize the concept of cause and effect to explain experience since we did not get this concept from experience?’ Locke before him thought it unproblematic to call the idea of cause and effect an *a posteriori* idea; thus, its objective validity is unproblematic in the same measure. Hume, however, realized that we never actually observe causation, but merely the conjunction of two events; hence, cause and effect are not *a posteriori* concepts in the sense that they were not directly observed, but neither are they *a priori* concepts. Instead,

...he concluded that reason completely and fully deceives herself with this concept, falsely taking it for her own child, when it is really nothing but a bastard of the imagination, which, impregnated by experience, and having brought certain representations under the law of association, passes off the resulting subjective necessity (i.e., habit) for an objective necessity (from insight). From which he concluded that reason has no power to think such connections, not even merely in general, because its concepts would be mere fictions (*Pro* 4:257-8).

Because Hume posed this critical question to himself, he “subsequently proceeded quite consistently in declaring it to be impossible to go beyond the boundary of experience with these concepts and the principle that they occasion” (A95/B127). Of course, Hume did not need to go this far, because “it never occurred to him that perhaps the understanding itself...could be the originator of the experience in which it is encountered...” (A95/B127). But given Hume’s assumptions, he was right to advance the skepticism that he did; and if the term ‘critical philosophy’ may be extended to describe anyone who confronted the *quid juris* question, then Hume was a critical philosopher before Kant.

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<sup>65</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *Theoretical Works After 1781*. Edited by Henry Allison and Peter Heath. *Prolegomena* Translated and Edited by Gary Hatfield. *The Cambridge Companion to the Works of Immanuel Kant*. Cambridge University Press, 2002 ed.



### C. The Rationalists and the *Quid Juris* Question

In Kant's mind, this elevates Hume above the rationalists; Kant has some rather pithy and harsh things to say about that tradition:

Plato assumed a previous intuition of divinity as the primary source of the pure concepts of the understanding and of first principles. Malebranche [*sic*] believed in a still-continuing perennial intuition of this primary being...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...However, the *deus ex machina* is the greatest absurdity one could hit upon in *the determination of the origin and validity of our cognitions...* (CK 10:131, my italics).

Kant characterizes the epistemologies of Plato, Malebranche, and Crusius as relying on explanations *deus ex machina*. This criticism is apparently analogous to the one given of a scientist, who when confronted with a problem that he cannot solve at the moment, concludes, 'God must have done this.' Kant has in mind, no doubt, the sort of explanation of the origin of innate ideas that Plato gives in the *Meno*:

...the divine among our poets...say...this...: As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before... (*Meno* 81b-c).<sup>66</sup>

Although it is true that Plato is not committed to this particular explanation, he does not give an alternate one, thus leaving himself open to Kant's charges. Instead of a deduction, there is an appeal to an unknown, and more significantly, *unknowable*, origin of our ideas. But if this origin is unknowable, then why do we have a right to conclude that the ideas gained in this way before birth apply necessarily to objects? Kant believes that Plato cannot answer this question.

One insufficiency of the LH criticism is that it is not at all clear that Kant is actually referring to the rationalist tradition in general, so it is significant that he takes up this criticism

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<sup>66</sup> Plato. *Plato: Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper, Assoc. Editor D.S. Hutchinson. *Meno* translated by G.M.A. Grube. Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1997 ed.

again in the final section of the second edition of the TD. Kant imagines one who defends the view that the categories are

subjective predispositions for 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 pre-formation system of pure reason)...[I]n such a case the categories would lack the necessity that is essential to their concept. For e.g., the concept of cause...would be false if it rested only on a subjective necessity, arbitrarily implanted in us... (B167).

It at first seems that this passage must be taken as a reference, once again, to Hume, since Hume directly confronts the issues of subjective necessity and causation. But a closer examination yields a different conclusion. First, Kant's language of an 'author' of our existence who 'arbitrarily implanted' concepts in us is an echo of the references to 'God' and explanations '*deus ex machina*' in the LH. Second, the subjective necessity of the TD passage is a 'predisposition,' by which Kant indicates something that arrived *before* experience. In contrast, Hume referred to subjectively necessary ideas such as causation as bastards implanted *by* experience. These considerations make it unlikely that Kant was addressing Hume here.

The best evidence, however, that Kant is not addressing the empiricists in the 'implantation passage' is gained by examining Kant's biological analogues in that same section (§27):

...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 the 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*) (B167).

Kant therefore encourages us to think of the first possibility, that the objects make the concepts possible, on analogy with the biological theory of *generatio aequivoca*. This is simply the theory of "spontaneous generation", and holds that "generation is the process by which the material

takes the form of the living organism... without the agency of other living organisms.”<sup>67</sup> The Guyer/Wood translation of the *Critique* calls this “[t]he generation of one sort of thing out of something essentially different, e.g., the supposed generation of flies from rotting meat” (264fn). In epistemology, this is what the empiricists propose, for elements of perception (one thing) are said to generate experiences and concepts in the mind (something essentially different). As a blank slate, the mind contributes nothing to this generation.

Kant’s swift dismissal of the *generatio aequivoca* model is explained by recalling his previous conclusion concerning the empirical unity of consciousness, namely that “no cognitions can occur in us, no connection and unity among them, without that unity of consciousness that precedes all data of the intuitions...” (A107). According to Kant, spontaneous generation and empiricism suffer for the same reason; they are partners in absurdity. In addition, spontaneous generation is incompatible with something he calls ‘preformation theory.’ Preformation theory is then analogized with whatever Kant is talking about in the ‘implantation passage’; hence, the implantation passage is not referring to empiricism. But what is preformation theory?

Like *generatio aequivoca*, preformation theory is a model of evolutionary development. This model, however, is more complicated because it was taken seriously by science and was controversial in Kant’s day. This theory holds that “the supreme world-cause... would only have placed in the initial products of its wisdom the initial predisposition by means of which an organic being produces more of its kind and constantly preserves the species itself (*CJ* 5:422).<sup>68</sup> God did not create the world in its current form, but God did create the elements necessary for

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<sup>67</sup> Wubnig, J. “*The Epigenesis of Pure Reason.*” *Kant-Studien.* 1969; 60.

<sup>68</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment.* Edited by Paul Guyer. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. *The Cambridge Edition to the Works of Immanuel Kant: Critique of the Power of Judgment.* Cambridge University Press, 1998 ed.

evolutionary development along pre-determined patterns. For example, the preformationist would give this analysis of reproduction:

[p]reformation assumed that all living things had been formed by God at the beginning of time and then encased in seeds or germs, either in the ovaries...or in the sperm...Conception merely awakened one of these sleeping forms..." (Reill 170).<sup>69</sup>

Kant contrasts preformation theory with the evolutionary theory which he actually prefers, namely epigenesis. The theories differ because in epigenesis, any given living thing is a *product* generated by some other living being; in contrast, preformation theory characterizes any given living being as an *educt* (CJ 5:423). The difference between products and educts can be characterized by speaking of the opposite modes of forces, *formative* and *motive*, that arose when speaking of the difference between things with natural purposes and those without; formative forces yield products, while motive forces yield educts.

Kant says that the preformationists are set apart as the ones who denied "every individual from the formative power or nature in order to allow it to come immediately from the hand of the creator" (CJ 5:423). In that case, purposes are not natural but supernatural. The beings which are generated have already been given formative force by God and therefore do not need the capacity for self-formation; if this were true, the term 'formative force' is no longer appropriate when describing organisms. Among other things, this implies "that the paternal contribution in generation is miniscule, merely setting in motion the development of structures already present in the egg..." (Lenoir 81).<sup>70</sup> If this is how the force required to produce the organism is analyzed, then it is a motive force producing an educt.

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<sup>69</sup> Reill, Peter. "Between Preformation and Epigenesis: Kant, Physiotherapy, and Natural History." In *New Essays on the Precritical Kant*, Edited by Tom Rockmore. Humanity Books: New York, 2001 ed.

<sup>70</sup> Lenoir, Timothy. *Kant, Blumenbach, and Vital Materialism in German Biology*. *Isis*, Vol. 74, No. 1, (Mar., 1980), pp. 77-108.

If, on the other hand, we *do* attribute a formative impulse to organisms, the “*receptivity* of the organism to external stimuli and the interconnected ability to set its organs in motion” is taken seriously (Lenoir 85). In contrast to the educt theory, on which there were “severe limits placed on this adaptive power by the original organization...” (Lenoir 85), the organisms could form *themselves* by adapting to external stimuli; because they form themselves, their mode of force is formative. In the end, Kant rejects preformation theory specifically because it does not respect the formative force that he attributes to nature:

Kant is saying that organic nature must be construed not merely as evolutionary – as self-evolving according to the preformation theory – but also exhibiting a certain creative activity – as self-evolving and relatively autonomous in its overall developmental process (Genova 265).<sup>71</sup>

If preformation were an epistemological theory, sense experience would be the paternal contribution and innate ideas the maternal contribution. This is, then, to attribute passivity to our conceptual capacity, which for Kant would mean that it is the categories that are purely passive: in that case, the categories would be nothing but ‘subjective predispositions...implanted in us.’ In terms of force, the categories would have motive as opposed to formative force. That this is an analogue to rationalism is made clear by noting two Leibnizian theories of which Kant would have been aware:

[s]ince Leibniz believed that souls are immortal, his theory is that all thoughts a mind will ever think were preformed at the Creation, when all souls were created. He also held a preformation theory of biology. He thought it analogous to his theory of mind and important for his theory of pre-established harmony, since it provided for the parallel between activities of living bodies and mind (Wubnig 150).

Since Leibniz championed preformation theory both in epistemology and biology, and since Kant would have been familiar with both of Leibniz’ positions, Kant must have had Leibniz at least partly in mind in the TD passage. But since I have demonstrated the continuity between the

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<sup>71</sup> Genova, A.C. “*Kant’s Epigenesis of Pure Reason*”. *Kant-Studien*. 1974; 65: 259-273.

LH passage and the TD passage, we now can observe that Kant thought his criticism caught up both Plato and Leibniz. It is not stretching things, therefore, to believe that Kant was attempting to characterize rationalism in general in those passages.

It is rationalism, then, that undermines objective validity according to Kant. His concern about objective validity may be demonstrated by examining another analogy suggested in the LH but not carried through: “[v]arious moralists have accepted precisely this view with respect to basic moral laws. Crusius believed in certain implanted rules for the purpose of forming judgments...” (CK 10:131). Kant is implicitly critical of this kind of moral theory because if the rules for moral judgments are implanted, then we have no right to characterize those judgments as *our* moral judgments. We are, so to speak, a conduit, a moral robot programmed by our maker who at best judges and subsequently acts in accordance with the moral law. The important point is that we are not justified in concluding anything about the judgment because we cannot explain *why* the judgment is the right one. It turns out that we are not the moral actors who deserves the moral praise (or blame), for if God ordered our moral judgments, then God is responsible for the origin of the judgment. We simply cannot be held responsible for our judgments and subsequent actions if we could not have judged otherwise.

A similar story can be told about implanted innate ideas. It may be that the judgments springing forth from our innate ideas ‘harmonize’ with the world perfectly. Perhaps, but whether they do or do not is necessarily unknown to us. The most I can say is that “I am so constituted that I cannot think of this representation otherwise than as so connected...” (B168). Karl Ameriks puts the matter this way: “Kant stresses that even for God to put a thought into us, there

must be a ground within us, a capacity to receive and have the thought; otherwise, there would be no point to say that it is we rather than God who have the thought” (Ameriks 263).<sup>72</sup>

Let’s consider the most optimistic case, namely, that our implanted representations of objects do indeed map onto the world perfectly. In that case, there would be a causal story to be told about my knowledge: experience causes my representations, but it does so by activating latent, implanted capacities, which are themselves effects, for God causes their existence. Therefore, similar to the moral case, the knower is not really us but God. And *that* is the best case; there is still the possibility that our implanter is Descartes’ evil genius, purposely causing mismatches between our implanted representations and the world. So Kant’s original question has perhaps the most force when altered to apply to rationalism: “With what right do we believe that our implanted ideas map onto the world?”

#### **D. Creative Intuition and the *Quid Juris* Problem**

Kant’s statements are provocative, and it would have been helpful for him to have said more about rationalism and preformation theory. But it is clear that he meant that the rationalist, just like the empiricist, grounds the relation of the representation and its putative objects by cause and effect. For the empiricist, the cause of our knowledge is experience; for the rationalist, the causes of our knowledge are experience *and* the implantation of innate ideas. Thus, for the empiricist, the determinateness necessary to turn sense perception into real experience must lie in the object; for the rationalist, the determinateness may be attributed to the ‘implanter.’ Neither position captures Kant’s formula that “the representation alone makes the object possible.” (A92/B124-5).

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<sup>72</sup> Ameriks, Karl. “The critique of metaphysics: Kant and traditional ontology.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, edited by Paul Guyer. Cambridge University Press, 1992 ed.

What Kant is describing is not a one-directional causal relationship, for Kant asks us to consider the possibility that the representation makes the appearance possible in the first place. As we have seen, this is analogous to considering an evolutionary theory other than *generatio aequivoca* or preformation theory. This is the possibility that "...the understanding itself, by means of [the categories], could be the originator of the experience in which its objects are encountered..." (A95/B127). This sounds at first like the reverse of empiricism, and thus another instance of a cause and effect relationship, particularly since Kant has characterized the dichotomy between his own preferred theory and empiricism in that way: "[e]ither...the object alone makes the representation possible, or...the representation alone makes the object possible" (A92/B124-5). However, the cause/effect model would be an inappropriate way to understand this possibility:

...if that in us which we call "representation" were active with regard to the object, that is, if the object itself were created by the representation (as when divine cognitions are conceived as the archetypes of things), the conformity of these representations to their objects could also be understood (*CK* 10:130).

Previously, we had been considering the empiricist theory that the representation is caused by the object. If the causal relationship is simply reversed, the representation causes the existence of the object. This is the model of idealism (but not transcendental idealism), a model that Kant plainly ruled out: the "representation in itself (for we are not here talking about its causality by means of the will) does not produce its object as far as its existence is concerned..." (A92/B125).

The reason that Kant rules out this possibility is that it would require a type of intuition that humans do not have. The relevant feature of *human* intuition is that it is only part of human cognition: "there are two stems of human cognition...namely sensibility and understanding," which can be analyzed separately because they have distinct tasks: "[t]hrough [sensibility] objects are given to us, but through [understanding] they are thought" (A15/B29). Human



cognition is thus made up of two distinct yet mutually dependent elements: “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” (A51/B75). The understanding thinks or judges, but it must have intuited objects lying before it about which to make judgments: “...all thought...must...ultimately be related to intuitions...since there is no other way in which objects can be given to us” (A19/B33).

This, however, is only one possible conception of intuition: “...I cannot presuppose that in every such being thinking and intuiting...are two different conditions for the exercise of its cognitive faculties” (CJ 5:403). This is a reference to Kant’s notion of an infinite intellect. For finite beings, knowledge of an object requires the work of two different faculties: intuition and thinking. In contrast, the intuition that Kant imagines that an infinite being would have is already intellectual. For an infinite mind, intellectual intuition (B68) and intuitive understanding (B145) would be synonyms. This “original being” (B72) therefore does not think in the sense that humans think, where thinking is a process separate from and dependent on intuition. Furthermore, this sort of intuition is not dependent on the existence of its objects, and hence is necessarily creative. The intuition of a finite being, *intuitus derivativus*, is an intuition that “is dependent on the existence of the object...” (B72); that is to say, there must already be an object for it to be affected. The intuition of the original being is *intuitus originarius*, which is an intuition “through which the existence of the object of intuition is itself given” (B72); that is to say, the *intuitus originarius* creates its own objects.

### **E. Spontaneity, for the First Time**

It turns out then that Kant’s notion that “the representation makes the object possible” (A92/B124-5) cannot mean that the representation creates its own object; making in this sense is

not creating. It would be accurate to say that divine intuition is spontaneous, which is quite different from the role of human intuition in cognition:

[o]ur cognition arises from two fundamental sources in the mind, the first of which is the reception of representations (the receptivity of impressions), the second the faculty for cognizing an object by means of the representations (spontaneity of concepts) (A50/B74).

Divine cognition is spontaneous, creative intuition; therefore thinking (i.e. spontaneous intellectual activity) is superfluous for divine cognition. Human cognition, however, involves both spontaneity and receptivity; thought is spontaneous, while sensibility is receptive.<sup>73</sup> Both elements are necessary for knowledge.

The spontaneity/receptivity distinction offers us another way to characterize empiricism. Kant criticizes empiricism for characterizing human cognition as purely receptive. But as Kant points out, if the powers of the mind are merely receptive, then there is no feature of the mind capable of the power of synthesis, for synthesis requires spontaneity. Without synthesis, however, even the weakest of experiences would not be possible:

[i]f every individual representation were entirely foreign to the other, as it were isolated and separated from it, there would never arise anything like cognition, which is a whole of compared and connected representations. If I therefore ascribe a synopsis to sense, because it contains a manifold in its intuition, a synthesis must always correspond to this, and receptivity can make cognitions possible only if combined with spontaneity (A97).

By not attributing any kind of spontaneity to human cognition, Kant points out, the empiricists cannot explain how raw sensation can even become the kind of intuition that be conceptualized; “the appearance would lack connection in accordance with universal and necessary laws, and would thus be intuition without thought...” (A111).

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<sup>73</sup> In a footnote, Kant adds that ‘intuition’ could be taken in two ways, for the “form of intuition merely gives the manifold” (B160fn.). This, however, is still not sufficient to account for experience, for the manifold must already be unified in order to be thought. Thus, Kant has recourse to a formal intuition, which “gives unity of the representation” (B160fn.). This means that while sensibility is passive, intuition is not, for “the unity of this a priori intuition belongs to space and time, and not to the concept of the understanding” (B160fn.).

So Kant believes that his insight that “receptivity can make cognitions possible only if combined with spontaneity” (A97) rules out rigorous ‘blank slate’ empiricism.<sup>74</sup> By itself, the rationalist may agree with this statement. However, the mind that has been implanted with ‘innate ideas’ is just as passive as the model of mind proposed by the empiricist. Kant would say that the rationalists had the good sense to posit *a priori* ideas, and thus do not have to rely on the unexplained determinateness of sense-data, but they believe that the spontaneity which necessarily exists when *a priori* ideas apply to experience does not spring from the *a priori* ideas themselves. Rather, the spontaneity of implanted innate ideas belongs to their author. Again, the evolutionary analogy rings true; in the preformation theory of evolutionary development, nature is inert, while God is active; the ideas that come to exist are therefore analogous to educts and not products. What appears to be the activity of nature is simply an ‘awakening’ or what God had already encased. But for Kant, in order for objective validity to obtain of *human* cognitions, the spontaneity must be *human* spontaneity. If the spontaneity belongs to the implanter it would not be ours.

What Kant has done, therefore, is to formulate a new model of spontaneity: the empiricists do not recognize spontaneity, the rationalists are forced to attribute spontaneity to the implanter, and the (non-transcendental) idealists must posit a type of spontaneous intuition that Kant believed that humans do not have.<sup>75</sup> Objects must conform to the mind and not vice-versa because the condition for the possibility of having objects at all is that they conform to the mind. But since they conform to the mind’s epistemic conditions, what the human mind cognizes are appearances of objects, not the objects as they are in themselves. This is the inevitable

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<sup>74</sup> This does necessarily rule out any doctrine that can go by the name ‘empiricism.’ Depending on how one defines empiricism, the empiricist may attribute some kind of spontaneity to the mind.

<sup>75</sup> Indeed, that fact that humans do not have the type of intuition that creates its own objects is central to his distinction between the *intellectus archetypi* and the *intellectus ectypi*. Cf. the Letter to Herz in *Correspondence of Kant*, (10:310)

consequence of making "...that in us which we call 'representation'... active with regard to the object" (CK 10:310). Furthermore, we simply have no basis for assuming that the object as it appears to us is the object as it is in itself: "[f]or if the senses merely represent something to us as it appears, then this something must also be a thing in itself and an object of non-sensible intuition, i.e., of the understanding" (A249). Therefore, while it is accurate to say that the epistemic conditions of the mind are constitutive of the appearance of the object, it is quite false to say that the mind has any existential causal role.

### F. Kantian Finitude

What does this imply about human cognition? Henry Allison attempts to locate Kant's radical redefinition of the limits of human thinking in Kant's theory of transcendental idealism, which he opposes to transcendental realism:

I understand by the transcendental idealism of all appearances the doctrine that they are all together to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves... To this idealism is opposed transcendental realism, which regards space and time as something given in themselves (independent of our sensibility). The transcendental realist therefore represents outer appearances... as things in themselves (A369).<sup>76</sup>

Transcendental realism, then, is simply a general label for any ontology that does not recognize a distinction between things as they appear and things as they are in themselves. According to Kant, therefore, all epistemology is either transcendently idealistic or transcendently realistic, for any epistemology either recognizes this distinction or it does not. Kant, apparently for the first time in Western philosophy, recognizes such a distinction; as Allison says, "[o]nly the 'critical philosophy' has succeeded in getting this distinction right" (Allison 16).<sup>77</sup> This is to say that Kant believes (and Allison shows) that all non-critical philosophies are, at bottom, varieties

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<sup>76</sup> And elsewhere Kant makes clear that this is a confusion of representations in general, not merely 'outer appearances': "[t]he realist, in the transcendental signification, makes the modifications of our sensibility into things subsisting in themselves, and hence makes mere representations into things in themselves" (A491/B519).

<sup>77</sup> Allison, Henry. (1983). *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

of transcendental realism; this is true of thinkers as widely varied as Descartes, Newton, Berkeley and Hume.<sup>78</sup>

It is in this context that Allison argues that Kant, for the first time, articulates a conception of the human mind that is genuinely human. Allison takes Kant's description of the Copernican Revolution as a straightforward statement of transcendental idealism:

[u]p 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 objects must conform to our cognition... (Bxvi).

This is a statement against transcendental realism because “the ‘objects’ to which our knowledge presumably conforms must be characterized as things in themselves in the transcendental sense” (Allison 29). Furthermore, Allison detects in this formula a different way to understand the nature of transcendental realism: “we can be said to know objects just to the extent to which our thought conforms to their real nature, or equivalently, to God’s thought of these same objects” (Allison 29). Allison thus introduces another name for transcendental realism: the theocentric view of knowledge. An epistemology is theocentric if it presupposes a “hypothetical “God’s eye view” of things [that] is used as a standard in terms of which the “objectivity” of human knowledge is analyzed” (Allison 19).

Symmetrically, Allison re-describes transcendental idealism as an ‘anthropocentric view of knowledge,’ “the defining characteristic of which is that the cognitive structure of the human mind is viewed as the source of certain conditions which must be met by anything that is to be represented as an object by such a mind” (Allison 29). The connection is that if one uncritically presupposes that that the mind conforms to objects, then one assumes that there are no conditions to which the object must conform if it is to be an object for us. And if there are no such *a priori*

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<sup>78</sup> See Allison, pp. 16-25.

conditions for human knowledge, then the object that appears is the object as it is in itself. Similarly, if there are no conditions which make the appearance a uniquely human appearance, then there is no qualitative difference between human and divine knowledge. As Allison says, “[t]o say that objects conform to our knowledge is just to say that they conform to the conditions under which we alone can present them as objects” (Allison 29). Allison gives these conditions a special name: ‘epistemic conditions.’ Allison therefore believes that transcendental idealism implies a doctrine of epistemic conditions; transcendental realism implies no such thing.

These two models of knowledge, in turn, imply two models of finitude. For the transcendental realist (or theocentric epistemologist), “human knowledge is judged by the ideal standard of divine knowledge and found wanting” (Allison 22). Importantly, this is merely a standard that in no way commits the one using it to affirm the existence of divine knowledge; it simply wonders how close non-omniscient thinkers are to omniscience. In the case of transcendental realism, there is no difference between how a finite intellect grasps an object and how it would be apprehended by an infinite, god-like intellect. Hence, the condition of non-omniscience in this case implies that the list of things we know is merely not as long as God’s list, although the things that we do know appear in the same way on God’s list as well. This means that human knowledge is divine knowledge writ small; reciprocally, divine knowledge is human knowledge writ large.

But for Kant, the accumulation of cognitions does not get us closer to omniscience. This would only be true if our cognitions were of things in themselves, and thus, of things as they are apprehended by God.<sup>79</sup> But since objects must conform to the conditions set by human spontaneity, we can be guaranteed that this can never be the case. Human spontaneity is thus a

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<sup>79</sup> Merold Westphal’s thesis is that Kant’s notion of the thing in itself is simply the thing viewed by God: “In Defense of the Thing in Itself,” *Kant-Studien*, 59/1 (1968), 118-141.

blessing and a curse: it makes the cognitions of objects possible while simultaneously making them mere appearances. If it were appropriate to measure “human knowledge...by the ideal standard of divine knowledge...”, then our finitude would be theocentric (Allison 22). But to use that measuring stick would be to use the wrong standard of measurement, for human and divine cognition are different sorts of things. Kant, then, by articulating a model of human cognition that cannot be measured by its proximity to divine cognition, has made possible a model of knowledge that Allison correctly characterizes as anthropocentric, for our knowledge can only be measured against the standard of other human cognizers. In this way, the anthropocentric model of knowledge carries with it a commitment to a unique type of finitude; thus, Kant has redefined finitude.

## Chapter 5: Kant and Aristotle in Dialogue

### Chapter Summary by Section

- A. *Introduction*
- B. *Kant's 'Intellectus Archetypus'* In Chapters 2 and 3, I argued for my interpretation of the nature of Aristotle's Contemplator. Here, I discuss Kant's *intellectus archetypus*.
- C. *Aristotle and Kant's Doctrine of Omniscience*. Aristotle and Kant have relevantly similar conceptions of omniscience, which is important because this shows that their different conceptions of non-omniscience are more easily contrasted. Specifically, both thinkers posit beings that are omniscient insofar as they possess eternal, active, intellectual intuition that has the world in mind.
- D. *Aristotle and Kant's Doctrine of Non-Omniscience*. In 4.E and F, I identified spontaneity as the key for understanding Kantian finitude. Here I show the connection between Kant's denial of (human) intellectual intuition, and its connection to spontaneity.
- E. *Conclusion*



## A. Introduction

In Chapter 3, I described Aristotle's God – a divine intellect that actively and eternally intuitively grasps the complete set of the intellectual forms of the world. In the present chapter I will describe Kant's God – the *intellectus archetypus* (B), and show that Kant and Aristotle have relevantly similar conceptions of this omniscient intellect (C). But their conception of a non-omniscient intellect is the issue here, and D explains the epistemological commitments that led them to argue incompatible versions of human cognition.

## B. Kant's *Intellectus Archetypus*

Kant considers the possibility of another type of cognition in three places: in the letter to Herz, after the discussion of the mechanism/teleology antinomy in the third *Critique*,<sup>80</sup> and in various places in the first *Critique*.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps the most obvious feature uniting all three discussions is that an alternate cognition is posited for the sake of better understanding human cognition. For example, after examining the nature of human understanding in the third *Critique*, Kant asks us to consider “a possible understanding other than the human one (as in the *Critique of Pure Reason* we had to have in mind another possible intuition if we were to hold our own to be a special kind, namely one that is valid of objects merely as appearance)” (*CJ* 5:405). Kant refers to this possible being in 1790 as an “*intellectus archetypus*” (*CJ* 5:408), a term he had already used in his 1772 letter to Herz. And while he did not use the term ‘*intellectus archetypus*’ in either edition of the first *Critique* (1781 and 1787) – there he focuses on the intuition and prefers the term “*intuitus originarius*” (B72) - he does say that this type of intuition already implies a unique type of understanding: “[a]n understanding, in which through self-consciousness of all the manifold would at the same time be given, would intuit; ours can only

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<sup>80</sup> 5:401-5:410

<sup>81</sup> A27/B43, A42/B59, B68, B71-2, B135, B145, A255/B310

think and must seek the intuition in the senses” (B135). So even though the first *Critique* is most concerned with imagining a possible non-human intuition, it is clear that Kant never meant to separate this non-human intuition from the non-human understanding that he mentions in his letter to Herz and develops in the third *Critique*. I will thus refer to a possible being with a non-human mode of cognition as the *intellectus archetypus*.

Our understanding, Kant emphasizes, is a discursive understanding that cannot judge without the intuited manifold. Thus, “it must of course be contingent what and how different must be the particular that can be given to it in nature and brought under its concepts” (*CJ* 5:406). That is, whatever manifold that is subject to concepts can only be the manifold (the particular) that is first intuited. Thus, the spontaneous power of the understanding is first dependent on an act of receptivity by the intuition. This type of intuition gives rise to a type of self-consciousness that is distinguished from the self-consciousness that would accompany an intellectual intuition:

[c]onsciousness of itself (apperception) is the simple representation of the I, and if the manifold in the subject were given self-actively through that alone, then the inner intuition would be intellectual. In human beings this consciousness requires inner perception of the manifold that is antecedently given in the subject, and the manner in which this is given in the mind without spontaneity must be called sensibility on account of this difference (B68).

And so a receptive intuition is always a sensible intuition. But since it is possible to imagine “a complete spontaneity of intuition...and thus an understanding in the most general sense of the term, one can thus also conceive of an intuitive understanding (negatively, namely merely as not discursive)...” (*CJ* 5:406). And this intuitive understanding is non-discursive not because it lacks this capacity, but because it has no need for it:

[f]or if I wanted to think of an understanding that itself intuited..., then the categories would have no significance at all with regard to such a cognition. They are only rules for an understanding whose entire capacity consists in thinking, i.e., in the action of bringing

the synthesis of the manifold that is given in intuition from elsewhere to the unity of apperception... (B 145).

Kant has pointed out that our understanding is discursive because it is limited by whatever manifold is intuited. We find the *intellectus archetypus*, then, “in the contrast... with our discursive, image-dependent understanding (*intellectus ectypus*)” (CJ 5:408).

### C. Aristotle and Kant’s Conception of Omniscience

In Chapter 3, I argued that Aristotle’s God has the sort of cognition that is eternal active intellectual intuiting of the complete set of intellectual forms, and that this counts as omniscience, provided omniscience is not understood as historical but nomological omniscience. In the previous section, I sketched an outline of Kant’s *intellectus archetypus*; now we are in a position to wonder whether these conceptions of divine cognition are relevantly similar. That there is at least one difference is clear, for Aristotle is committed to the existence of his Contemplator, while Kant states several times that he is not committed to the existence of the *intellectus archetypus*. Certainly, Kant finds it useful to posit the *idea* of such a cognition, but this does not imply that the existence of a being with this cognition is posited. Rather, “...I cannot presuppose that in every such being thinking and intuiting...are two different conditions for the exercise of the cognitive faculties” (CJ 5:402, my italics). And certainly, not being able to rule out the existence of the *intellectus archetypus* is different than arguing for it. And, as if to obviate criticism that he may become engaged in metaphysical speculation, Kant says that “...it is not at all necessary to prove that such an *intellectus archetypus* is possible, but only that in the contrast of it with our discursive, image-dependent understanding (*intellectus ectypus*) and the contingency of such a constitution we are led to this idea (of an *intellectus archetypus*)...” (CJ 5:408).

Besides this difference, there are several important similarities, such as that in both cases God's cognition is unerring. For Aristotle, the perfection of God's cognition is an implication of the fact that it is intuitive, for intuition cannot err:

...thinking is...distinct from perceiving – I mean that in which we find rightness and wrongness – rightness in understanding, knowledge, true opinion, wrongness in their opposites: for perception of special objects of sense is always free from truth and error... while it is possible to think falsely as well as truly, and thought is found only where there is discourse of reason (*DA* 427b9-14).

Aristotle here specifically refers to sensible intuition, which is always passive. However, there is no reason not to extend this point to both forms of intellectual intuition as well; what makes perception unerring is not that it is sensible, but that it is simple affection by an object.

Kant shares Aristotle's view of divine intuition. While the *intellectus archetypus* has objects, it has them in a unique way: "...we can also conceive of an understanding which, since it is not discursive like ours but is intuitive, goes from...the whole to the parts...and in whose representation of the whole, there is no contingency of the combination of the parts" (*CJ* 5:407). And not only would contingency not be a problem, but the concern that "things can be possible without being actual," is only a concern for a cognition with "two heterogeneous elements" (*CJ* 5:402-3). But things are different for an intuitive understanding:

...if our understanding were intuitive, it would have no objects except what is actual. Concepts (which pertain merely to the possibility of an object) and sensible intuitions (which merely give us something, without thereby allowing us to cognize it as an object) would both disappear (*CJ* 5:402).

It is impossible for Aristotle's Contemplator to err, then, because its cognition is intuitive. Kant would undoubtedly agree, but he goes further by arguing that there is no difference between possible and actual objects for an *intellectus archetypus*, and hence, no possibility of error.

Chapter 3 shows that God's contemplation is eternal and of the complete set of intellectual forms, and that this constitutes omniscience. Does Kant also believe that God has the

world in mind? In the letter to Herz, Kant talks about representations that a divine cognition would have:

if that which is called representation in us were active in relation to the object, i.e., if the object itself were created by the representation (as when divine cognitions are viewed as the archetypes of things), the conformity of these representations could be understood (CK 10:130).

In this context, Kant is pointing to the *quid juris* question: with what right do we human cognizers believe that the representations of objects with which we find ourselves conform to the objects themselves? But this question dissolves if the ‘object itself were created by the representation.’ This is the kind of idealism that Kant denied was possible in the case of human cognizers; while we make possible the form of experience, we cannot create the content. Hence, any human idealism is merely transcendental idealism. But since divine cognition creates objects in themselves, its cognition is archetypal. Indeed, this is why the *intellectus archtypus* is so-called.

In the first *Critique*, although Kant does not use the phrase ‘*intellectus archtypus*,’ he nevertheless emphasizes that the human intuition is called ‘*intuitus derivatus*’ and the non-human intuition is ‘*intuitus originarius*’ because of how they stand with respect to the existence of objects; for the original intuition, “the existence of the object of intuition is itself given,” while human intuition “is dependent upon the existence of the object” (B72). Kant also uses the language of production:

[f]or if I wanted to think of an understanding that itself intuited (as, say, a divine understanding, which would not represent given objects, but through whose representation the objects would themselves at the same time be given, *or produced*), then the categories would have no significance at all with regard to such a cognition. (B145, my italics).

Merold Westphal points to an analogy. He notes that for Kant,

[t]he definitions, axioms, and demonstrations which are possible in mathematics result from a direct insight we have into mathematical objects. One might say that we simply read off their properties. But this is possible only because in mathematics we have first constructed or created our objects in spatial or temporal intuition which is pure... a knower whose intuition was creative would have a knowledge of nature like our knowledge of mathematical objects (Westphal 123).

In mathematics, there is only form and no content, which makes our intuition creational in this case. Although we don't know what it might be like to create content, at least we know what it is like to create form, and so this analogy may be useful. And while it would be pressing things to think of Aristotle's God as a creator in a similar sense (the Unmoved Mover famously is the first mover of the universe by being an object of desire,<sup>82</sup> not by making it),<sup>83</sup> this difference is unimportant for my present investigation. The point I am making is that the *intellectus archetypus*, as much as Aristotle's God, has the world in mind; the proof is that for the *intellectus archetypus*, creating the world and having it in mind are identical events. This is omniscience that is unerring and intuitive.

And, significantly, while the divine, non-discursive cognitions of Kant and Aristotle have the world in mind, they do not have recourse to imagination. Kant is explicit about this: the *intellectus archetypus* contrasts "with our discursive, image-dependent understanding..." (*CJ* 5:408). But does Aristotle's God ever imagine? Aristotle says that "imagination is different from either perceiving or discursive thinking, though it is not found without sensation, or judgment without it" (*DA* 427b14-15). Obviously, perception gives rise to imagination, although not necessarily so, since "imagination [is not] found in all brutes...e.g. it is not found in ants or bees or grubs" (*DA* 428a9-10). The difference is that human cognition is also discursive, and images are necessary for discursivity: "[t]o the thinking soul [τῆ διανοητικῆ ψυχῆ] images serve as if

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<sup>82</sup> 1072a25-26

<sup>83</sup> Kosman argues that the interpretation that the 'maker mind' could be a description of God creating the universe by thinking it is unsupported by the text. See "What does the Maker Mind make?" p. 344.

they were contents of perception... That is why the soul never thinks without an image” (*DA* 431a15-17). There can be no mental activity for human beings unless we first perceive; in this sense, our mind is dependent upon something being given. Usually, however, when we think, we are not standing in front of our object. This kind of direct perception, however, is not necessary because of our ability to recall images of the particulars. Comportment toward images, then, is a substitute for comportment toward particulars, which is why ‘images serve as if they were contents of perception.’

Charles Kahn explains Aristotle’s reasoning about phantasms as a logical consequence of his analysis of the conditions of a composite existence:

[i]n order for [any minimally rational train of thought] to take place the first condition – call it condition A – is empirical consciousness or sentience, what human beings share with animals... Sentience in the subjective side of *aisthesis*... The second condition, Condition B, is the specific capacity of *nous*, access to the noetic domain... The requirement of phantasms is a direct consequence of Condition A, our existence as sentient animals. As sentient, embodied beings, we cannot think even of *noeta*, intelligible objects, except by way of phantasms, the hylomorphic basis of our thought... (Kahn 362).<sup>84</sup>

Kahn correctly recognizes that contemplating itself is not essentially tied to images. This means that God, who is not bound by Condition A, does not need images in order to contemplate. Thus, Kahn believes that while human contemplation is necessarily tied to phantasms (although this part of his analysis is mistaken),<sup>85</sup> it is not because of the nature of intelligible objects, but the way that they are acquired.<sup>86</sup> Thus, both Kant and Aristotle propose the sort of unerring omniscience that has the world in mind, but does not have recourse to either imagination or discursivity; thus, both Aristotle’s God and the *intellectus archetypus* know the world

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<sup>84</sup> Kahn, Charles. “Aristotle on Thinking.” *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima*. Edited by Martha Nussbaum and Amelie Rorty. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, ed.

<sup>85</sup> See 2.H

<sup>86</sup> As hylomorphic beings, our having of intelligible objects is necessarily dependent on specific acts of passive intuition. Thus, the way that humans have intelligible objects is a consequence of our embodiment and that we must ‘collect’ the forms one by one. If God’s contemplation can be taken to be complete and eternal possession of the noetic domain, then God’s contemplation does not require imagination.

intuitively.<sup>87</sup> Since both thinkers posit beings that are omniscient because they possess active, intellectual intuition, their conceptions of non-omniscience may be contrasted.

#### **D. The Importance of Intellectual Intuition**

Thus far, I have proved that while Kant and Aristotle share a conception of divine omniscience, they have incompatible interpretations of non-omniscience. In Chapter 4.F, I argued that it is Kant's notion of epistemic conditions that sets his doctrine of non-omniscience apart from the tradition; for Kant, any intuited content is subject to epistemic conditions arising from spontaneity. While this is true, it is also potentially misleading; for example, Aristotle has identified sensible intuition, passive intellectual intuition, discursive reasoning, and active intellectual intuition (i.e. contemplation) as conceptually separable functions of human cognition, and the last two functions can be thought of as spontaneous in a certain sense. The important difference is that cognitive spontaneity may be either *a priori* or *a posteriori*. Aristotle's doctrine is that the self-intuiting of the intellectual forms (i.e. the mind's intuition of itself) is the likely (or perhaps inevitable) consequence of *previously* intuiting the intellectual forms in experience, since the mind is constituted by the forms that it intuits in experience. In this way, active intellectual intuition (and a similar story can be told about discursivity) is spontaneous *a posteriori*. But when Kant talks about the capacity of human cognition for spontaneity, he always means *a priori* spontaneity.

The reason for this, I argue, begins with his beliefs about intuition. Kant characterizes human intuition and divine intuition as *intuitus derivativus* and *intuitus originarius*,

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<sup>87</sup>I am not going to take up the issue of whether this sort of omniscience is compatible with the personal God of traditional theism. Thomas Aquinas, of course, works hard to show that Aristotle's God is personal, but it is impossible not to notice his interest in doing so, and I have noted in Chapter 3 why this interpretation is unlikely. Westphal believes that Kant's *intellectus archetypus* is a personal God, although this claim requires further support. But my question was never anything like 'is Aristotle's divine intellect and Kant's *intellectus archetypus* identical with or compatible with the God of ordinary theism?' Rather, my concern is whether Kant and Aristotle have a relevantly similar conception of divine cognition. I have shown that there is such a similarity.



respectively. But a Latin Aristotle also could have easily used the term ‘*intuitus derivativus*,’ provided that we recognize its two species – sensible derived intuition and intellectual derived intuition. The difference is that for Kant, any derived intuition is necessarily non-intellectual; any intellectual intuition is already creative and active. As he says, even if the pure forms of intuition in some other kind of being with *intuitus derivativus* were not space and time, “this kind of intuition would not cease to be sensibility, *for the very reason that it is derived*” (B72, my italics). For Kant, then, there is a logical connection between the derivativeness of the intuition and its sensibility, such that any receptive intuition is necessarily sensible. By positing intellectual intuition that is nevertheless passive, Aristotle has taken a position irreconcilable with Kant’s.

Early in his career, Kant held a position closer to Aristotle’s. In the *Inaugural Dissertation*,<sup>88</sup> he says that

*[i]ntelligence is the faculty of a subject in virtue of which it has the power to represent things which cannot by their own quality come before the sense of that subject. The object of sensibility is the sensible; that which contains nothing but what is to be cognized through the intelligence is intelligible. In the schools of the ancients, the former was called a *phenomenon* and the latter a *noumenon*...It is thus clear that things which are sensible are representations of things as they appear, while things which are intellectual are representations of things as they are (ID 2:392-3).*

That is, by intellectual intuition, “the concepts themselves, whether of things or relations, are given, and this is their real use” (ID 2:393).

Of course, Kant completely reversed himself in his mature work, as it became fundamental for the critical philosophy that the faculty of sensibility was, for humans, the only faculty that could intuit:

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<sup>88</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *The Cambridge Companion to the Works of Immanuel Kant: Theoretical Philosophy, 1775-1790*. Translated and edited by David Walford in collaboration with Ralf Meerbore. Cambridge University Press, 1992 ed.

[t]he capacity (receptivity) to acquire representations through the way in which we are affected by objects is called sensibility. Objects are therefore given to us by the sensibility, and *it alone affords us intuitions*; but they are thought through the understanding, and from it arise concepts. But all thought... must ultimately be related to intuitions, thus, in our case, sensibility, since there is no other way objects can be given to us (A19/B33, my italics).

Later in the first *Critique*, Kant frames his identification of passive intuition and sensible intuition by again bringing up the distinction between *phenomena* and *noumena*:

[a]ppearances, to the extent that as objects they are thought in accordance with the unity of the categories, are called *phaenomena*. If, however, I suppose there to be things that are merely objects of the understanding and that, nevertheless, can be given to an intuition, although not to sensible intuition (as *coram intuitu intellectuali* [by means of intellectual intuition]), then such things would be called *noumena*" (A248-9, my insertion).

For the critical Kant, the understanding has access to objects intuited by sensibility, but this means that its mode of access is always mediated. What Kant is considering in the following quote, as above, is *immediate* intuitive intellectual access:

[w]ith regard to appearances, to be sure, both understanding and reason can be used; but it must be asked whether they would still have any use if the object were not appearance (*noumenon*), and one takes it in this sense if one thinks of it as merely intelligible, i.e., as given to the understanding alone and not to the senses at all... The question is thus: whether beyond the empirical use of the understanding... a transcendental one is also possible, pertaining to the *noumenon* as an object - which question we have answered negatively (A257/B313).

Kant argues that the understanding has an essential role to play in unifying the manifold of intuition (this is what he refers to here as its empirical use), but the question before us now is whether the understanding has any objects *proper to it* that it acquires through intuition (this is what he here calls its transcendental use, i.e. when an intellectual object is given to the understanding). This is the possibility that Kant rejects in the case of human beings. Aristotle, however, answers Kant's question in the affirmative. He *does* believe that there are intellectual objects that are intuited.

This analysis suggests that Kant's *noumena* and Aristotle's *ta noeta* are relevantly similar. They are 1) objects (or things), 2) objects that are given to the intuition, and therefore 3) passively intuited objects, 4), objects that are inaccessible to the sensible intuition and therefore 5) objects that can only be intuited by the intellect; of course the difference is that for Kant, *noumena*, whatever their ontological status, cannot be accessed by human cognition. There is a role for the understanding in Kantian epistemology; this is why Kant says that "[w]ith regard to appearances, to be sure, both understanding and reason can be used (A257/B313). But this use of the understanding requires *a priori* spontaneity, which is importantly different from the 'real use' suggested by some rationalists (and by the early Kant), where objects are intuited by the understanding. For Kant, therefore, the spontaneity attributed to cognition is *a priori*, and this is because of his rejection of intellectual intuition.<sup>89</sup>

### E. Conclusion

In Chapters 1-5, I have shown that 1) Kant and Aristotle have incompatible conceptions of non-omniscience, and that 2) the root of this disagreement is their incompatible positions on the possibility of passive intellectual intuition. Chapters 6 and 7 now have the task of evaluating these two positions. Two things are clear about Kant's position on passive intellectual intuition: at the beginning of his career, he thought that both sensible and intellectual intuition was possible because objects could be given either to sensibility or the understanding, depending on the nature of the object. Yet just as clearly, he rejected intellectual intuition by the advent of the critical

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<sup>89</sup> A traditional empiricist would agree that there is nothing like intellectual intuition; thus, they share Kant's position that all intuition is sensible. Kant, however, argues that mere sense intuition cannot explain cognition, and thus, empiricism is untenable: [i]f every individual representation were entirely foreign to the other, as it were isolated and separated from it, the there would never arise anything like cognition, which is a whole of compared and connected representations. If I therefore ascribe a synopsis to sense, because it contains a manifold in its intuition, a synthesis must always correspond to this, and receptivity can make cognitions possible only if combined with spontaneity (A97).

philosophy. In this present chapter, I have argued that this makes all the difference for his position on the nature of non-omniscience. So is Kant justified in this restriction?

In Chapter 6, I investigate this issue by first examining Kant's analysis of the difference between a legitimate and an illegitimate judgment, and I will call his conclusion on this matter his 'doctrine of legitimate judgments' (DLJ). The connection between Kant's DLJ and the possibility of passive intellectual intuition is that one way for a judgment to be illegitimate is if it presupposes that the understanding does not simply have the task of unifying the manifold given by sensible intuition. It has, in addition, what Kant called in the *Inaugural Dissertation* a 'real use,' namely, the cognition of objects that are given to it independently of sensibility. This amounts to a commitment to the human capacity to cognize (and not just think) *noumenal* objects, which means not only that humans can cognize things as they are themselves,<sup>90</sup> but also metaphysical ideas, namely, God, the soul, and the true nature of the world.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, if one fails to restrict human intuition to sensibility, then we have the right to any judgment whatsoever – including metaphysical ones - provided we have justified our judgment. Therefore, if Kant is able to show that humans can merely think about (and not truly cognize) things in themselves and metaphysical ideas, then Kant will be justified in rejecting passive intellectual intuition. In Chapter 6, I explore the meaning of the DLJ, and find that Aristotle's unique doctrine of intellectual intuition renders Kant's argument(s) against it irrelevant. This anticipates Chapter 7, in which I evaluate another justification for Kant's position on the

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<sup>90</sup> Kant says that "...if we call certain objects, as appearances, beings of sense (*phaenomena*)...we distinguish the way in which we intuit them from their constitution in itself..." (B306). Cf. A254/B310: "[t]he concept of a noumenon [is the concept] of a thing that is not to be thought of as an object of the senses but rather as a thing in itself..."

<sup>91</sup> Kant goes further by connecting things in themselves with the transcendental ideas in the *Prolegomena*: "[n]ow hyperbolic objects of this kind are what are called noumena or pure beings of the understanding...such as e.g. *substance*...or a *cause*...But if reason, which can never be fully satisfied with any use of the rules of the understanding in experience because such use is always conditioned, requires completion of the chain of conditions...These are then the transcendental ideas" (4:332-333).

impossibility of intellectual intuition, namely the antinomial attack on metaphysics, which I do find successful.

## Chapter 6: “The Meaning and Attempted Justification of Kant’s Doctrine of Legitimate Judgments”

### Chapter Summary

- A. *Introduction.* I explain Kant’s doctrine of legitimate judgments (DLJ).
- B. *That Extra-Intuitive Judgments Must Be Conditioning Judgments.* Kant’s DLJ has been attacked on the grounds that it is undeveloped (Ameriks) and that it excludes scientific theories (Hegel). I argue that Kant could have responded to these criticisms first by noting that an extra-intuitive judgment must be a conditioning judgment.
- C. *That Conditioning Judgments Must Not Be of the Unconditioned.* Kant must develop another limit to conditioning judgments, namely, that they must not be of the unconditioned; if they are of the unconditioned, then one has assumed transcendental realism.
- D. *Should We Believe Kant’s Doctrine of Legitimate Judgments?* I argue that Kant’s positions on legitimate judgments and intellectual intuition (detailed in 5.D) are dogmatic. They both require the presupposition that affection by intellectual objects is impossible, but Aristotle argues that intellectual affection is not just possible but necessary for experience. Thus, Kant’s DLJ is not relevant for Aristotle.

## A. Introduction

In Chapter 4, I pointed to Kant's *quid juris* question:

[j]urists, when they speak of entitlements and claims, distinguish in a legal matter between the questions about what is lawful (*quid juris*) and that which concerns the fact (*quid facti*), and since they demand proof of both, they call the first, that which is to establish the entitlement or the legal claim, the deduction (A84/B116).

In answer to his own question, Kant concluded that we have a right to a judgment if and only if the concepts that it employs can be deduced:

[a]mong the many concepts...that constitute the very mixed fabric of human cognition, there are some that are destined for pure use a priori...and these always require a deduction of their entitlement... I therefore call the explanation of the way in which concepts can relate to objects a priori their transcendental deduction, and distinguish this from the empirical deduction, which shows how a concept is acquired through experience (A85/B117).

Kant concludes that concepts such as 'cause,' 'effect,' and 'negation' can be transcendently deduced, since they make experience possible. Concepts such as 'rock,' 'warm,' and 'giraffe,' can be empirically deduced since the objects which give rise to those concepts are given in experience. We have a right to make any judgment which uses these concepts, even when that judgment is false. Since we have a right to these and no other judgments, this doctrine may be referred to as Kant's doctrine of legitimate judgments (DLJ).<sup>92</sup> In Chapter 4, I showed how this doctrine commits Kant to a unique interpretation of non-omniscience. But now the *success* of the DLJ takes on significance, because as I showed in Chapter 5, whether it can be defended or not depends on whether Kant or Aristotle has a better interpretation of non-omniscience. In sections B and C, I develop Kant's DLJ in a way in that is both necessary and consistent with Kant's own remarks elsewhere in the *Critique*. While it is clear that this doctrine, if true, would undermine Aristotle's claims about the power of reason, it is still not clear how defensible it is. In sections

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<sup>92</sup> It is important to note that Kant argues that metaphysical judgments are legitimate provided they are not attempts to extend our knowledge, but are necessarily postulated by the practical reason.

D-G, then, I will consider two different potential justifications for this doctrine and evaluate the extent to which those justifications are problematic for Aristotle. I find these defenses generally unsuccessful, which anticipates Chapter 7 where I consider a third Kantian reason for us to believe that metaphysical judgments are illegitimate judgments.

### **B. That Extra-Intuitive Judgments Must Be ‘Conditioning Judgments’**

Kant calls judgments that employ concepts that are neither transcendently nor empirically deducible ‘transcendent judgments;’ for reasons that will become clear, I will use the less pejorative term ‘extra-intuitive judgments.’ It is possible to believe that Kant finishes his explanation of the DLJ here in the Transcendental Analytic. If so, extra-intuitive judgments and illegitimate judgments would be the same thing. But this is a difficult claim, and disappoints commentators such as Ameriks: “[t]o say simply that such claims are illegitimately “transcendent” is to beg a lot of questions about what that means, and it is surely not easy to hold that all of the *Critique’s* own major claims...are nontranscendent in a evident sense” (Ameriks 258). Ameriks is here pointing out that even if the results of the Transcendental Analytic are accepted unconditionally, it is not obvious that the arguments of the Analytic are intended to rule out the possibility that all other judgments are illegitimate. While Ameriks is right to complain that Kant does not develop his DLJ *at this point* in the first *Critique*, it is possible to show that there is more to the story because Kant does satisfactorily develop his doctrine in the Transcendental Dialectic.

What I propose, however, is not a widely accepted interpretation of the division of labor between the Analytic and the Dialectic. The Transcendental Analytic distinguishes legitimate and illegitimate judgments and thus is concerned with the understanding insofar as it is our capacity to make judgments, while the Transcendental Dialectic is focused on how reason links judgments together in a syllogism. But what is important for my investigation, and what still



remains unclear, is whether the Dialectic develops the DLJ. It is possible to believe that the Transcendental Analytic has explained *why* some judgments are illegitimate, while the Transcendental Dialectic merely explains *how* we arrive at some of those illegitimate judgments (namely, the traditional metaphysical ones). As such, it is nothing more than a genealogy of metaphysical judgments. Paul Guyer appears to accept this interpretation of the division of labor between these two sections while evaluating the success of the Transcendental Dialectic:

...even if reason is tempted by some natural path to formulate or posit these transcendental ideas...can it acquire any knowledge by doing so? Don't claims to knowledge have to answer the *quid juris*...? Of course they do, and Kant's argument against traditional metaphysics is precisely that although it has formed its transcendental ideas by a natural mechanism, it has ignored the chief result of Kant's own critical philosophy, namely that concepts yield knowledge only when applied to intuitions.... (Guyer 133).<sup>93</sup>

Guyer is saying that Kant has *already* critiqued traditional metaphysics in the Transcendental Analytic by showing why some judgments are illegitimate (i.e., that they did not answer the *quid juris* question).<sup>94</sup> The Transcendental Dialectic is merely given the task of laying out the 'natural mechanism' or the 'natural path' that we take to metaphysics; that is, it explains how and why we come to have the metaphysical concepts with which we find ourselves. We should note that if Guyer is right that the Transcendental Dialectic does not extend the argument of the Transcendental Analytic, we have a right to be disappointed, for the notion that all transcendent judgments are illegitimate is not at all clear, as Ameriks has pointed out.

It is not, however, all Kant has to say on the matter. We may begin by recalling Kant's warning about the misuse of judgment. When judgment is misused, it judges "without distinction about objects that are not given to us, which perhaps indeed could not be given to us in any way"

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<sup>93</sup> Guyer, Paul. Kant. London ; New York : Routledge, 2006 ed.

<sup>94</sup> He also says that "[i]n the second part of the Transcendental Logic, its Transcendental Dialectic, Kant turns to the critique of traditional metaphysics that he will carry out on the basis of the analysis of the necessary conditions of knowledge that he has offered in the Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic" (Guyer 126).

(A64/B88). There are two distinctions buried in this sentence. The first is between objects that are not *in fact* given to us, and objects that *could not be* given to us. Examples of the former include devils and unicorns, while examples of the latter would include God and the soul. A second distinction is one that is not made explicitly, but seems relevant: when we ‘judge about objects,’ we may be either making existential judgments or predicative judgments. Combining these distinctions yields four types of synthetic judgments: existential judgments of objects that could be given in intuition (“Demons exist”), existential judgments of objects that could not be given in intuition (“The soul exists”), predicative judgments of objects that could be given in intuition (“Demons are warm”), and predicative judgments of objects that could not be given in intuition (“The soul is immortal”).

There is still a third important distinction to be made that will double the number of judgments, and unlike the first two distinctions, Kant does not address it explicitly in *Transcendental Analytic*. It is that some judgments are made for the sake of accounting for some feature of experience, while some judgments are not; I will call judgments of the former kind ‘conditioning judgments,’ since they attempt to give the conditions that must hold in order to explain an appearance. Demons are not intuited, of course, but what gives an existential judgment about them a real air of implausibility is when this judgment is not made for the sake of accounting for any object given in sense experience. This raises an important question: is the judgment “demons are red” illegitimate *because* demons are not in fact given to us in intuition, or *because* that judgment is not made for the sake of unifying experience? And is it any different in the case of objects that could not be given in any possible intuition? For instance, should the judgment that ‘the soul is immortal’ be rejected *because* the soul could not be given to us in intuition, or *because* that judgment does not help make sense of experience? With the addition of

this third criterion, there are now eight types of judgments, for any judgment may be categorized according to whether it is existential or predicative, whether its object could be given in possible experience or not, and whether it is made for the sake of accounting for experience or not.

Consider these five scientific judgments:

- A. "The solar system is heliocentric"
- B. "Black holes occupy every region of space"
- C. "Atom X has X number of electrons"
- D. "Magnetic force exists"
- E. "Dinosaurs existed"

Since Kant is a clear advocate of theoretical science, his DLJ must be interpreted in such a way as to allow the right of scientists to make these judgments. Two of the judgments (B, D) concern objects that could not be given in any possible intuition, while three contain objects that could (A, C, E); three of the judgments (A,B,C) are predicative, while two are existential (D,E). Thus, these five judgments, while all made for the sake of unifying experience, cut across our first two distinctions of predicative/existential and accessible/not accessible in possible intuition. And yet they must all be taken as legitimate. This means that what separates them from the judgment "demons are red" is a single criterion, namely, that our five scientific judgments are attempts to make sense of sense-experience.

Before I defend Kant, I want to note that the point I am making is not always appreciated. James Kreines points out that this is precisely one of Hegel's motivations for rejecting Kant's attempt to limit cognition.<sup>95</sup> Hegel says that "the empirical sciences do not stop at the perception of *single instances* of appearance; but through thinking they have prepared the material for philosophy by finding universal determinations, kinds, and laws" (12n).<sup>96</sup> According to Kreines, this means that Hegel believes that "there are no sharp lines dividing our insight into objects of

<sup>95</sup> Kreines, James (2007). 'Between the Bounds of Experience and Divine Intuition: Kant's Epistemic Limits and Hegel's Ambitions', *Inquiry*, 50: 3, 306-334.

<sup>96</sup> Hegel, GWF. *The Encyclopaedia Logic*. Translated by T.F. Geraets., W.A. Suchting, and H.S. Harris. Hackett Publishing Company; Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1991 ed.

perception from our insight into laws and kinds...so no sharp line at which knowledge might be said to end” (Kreines 322). As a result, “we can gain knowledge by thinking about what we observe, and drawing inferences about the natural laws and kinds which *explain our observations*” (Kreines 321, my italics). Hegel, then, rejects Kant’s attempt to limit extra-intuitive judgments by showing that some extra-intuitive judgments must be accepted as legitimate.

The response open to Kant, and I believe the correct response, is to say that the judgment that magnetic force exists is a legitimate judgment but only because it is giving unity to some observable experiences; that is to say, it is *explanatory* of experience. So while its object (magnetic force) is not (and cannot be) given in experience, this affirmative existential judgment is legitimate. In other words, a legitimate judgment is now one which *either* employs concepts that can be deduced (whether empirically or transcendently) *or* judgments that are made for the sake of explaining judgments which employ said concepts. Since these judgments attempt to derive the conditions necessary for explaining legitimate judgments, they may be described as ‘conditioning judgments.’

The judgment that black holes exist counts as a conditioning judgment because black holes are posited for the sake of making sense of some highly complicated calculations. But imagine a person before the advent of modern physics who claimed that light and energy got trapped into pits and could never get out, and when asked, he claimed to have come up with this theory to amuse his friends. Such a judgment would be illegitimate, but not because of the judgment itself; its illegitimacy issues from the fact that it was not given for the sake of unifying what is given in experience.

Kant does not say explicitly that conditioning judgments must be taken as legitimate, although he implies his support of this doctrine when disparaging certain metaphysical judgments that make knowledge claims for the sake of satisfying some interest with which we find ourselves. In a rarely cited section of the antinomies, “On the interest of reason in these conflicts,” Kant anticipates some philosophical and psychological insights that wouldn’t be widely accepted for nearly a century. Kant considers the factors involved in pushing us toward the

...side we would *prefer* to fight... Since in this case we would consult not the logical criterion of truth but merely our *interest*, our present investigation... will have the utility of making it comprehensible why the participants in this dispute have sooner taken one side than the other... (A465/B493, my italics).

Kant believes that half of the antinomical metaphysical positions “are so many cornerstones of morality and religion,” while the other half of the positions “rob us of these supports...” (A466/B94). That is to say, the interest that at least partly guides us to champion certain metaphysical positions is a pre-critical acceptance or rejection of religion. Whether Kant’s psychological analysis of exactly how our pre-critical interests drive our metaphysical arguments is correct is not the interesting point here. What is relevant is to note is that Kant believes that some metaphysical judgments<sup>97</sup> are attempts to answer to our idiosyncratic *interests*, not attempts to account for *experience*. And we may extend this point to include not just concepts employed to further religious interests, but any interest at all, whether it be the concept of ‘fortune’ used by fortune-tellers for profit, or the concept of ‘black holes’ used by our jokester.

This is certainly a fair observation in the case of some metaphysical judgments. Take judgments about the soul, for example. Religious believers usually make existential judgments about the soul, but those judgments are easily classified as illegitimate because they are mere

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<sup>97</sup> Here he is talking specifically about cosmological arguments, but there is no reason why this insight could not be extended to include rational psychology and arguments for the existence of God.

attempts to explain how an article of faith, namely, immortality, may be possible, and not an attempt to explain what is given in experience. And obviously, this would extend to judgments about the existence of God. For example, immediately after Anselm gives the ontological argument for God's existence, he prays, "I give thanks, good Lord, I give thanks to you, since what I believed before through your free gift I now so understand..."<sup>98</sup> Clearly, Anselm had a practical interest in God's existence, and that practical interest drove him to articulate his proof for God's existence. With this proof in his back pocket, he could always strengthen his own faith when it was failing, or perhaps have a ready philosophical argument to appeal to the atheist's rational side. In this case, the metaphysical judgment that God necessarily exists in reality is a metaphysical judgment posited because of an interest and in no way accounts for what is given in experience. Kant's argument that judgments must respect the limits of sensibility is violated here, since this judgment is not about an object given in experience nor it is a judgment that attempts to explain what is given in sensibility. My point here is that Ameriks and Hegel were both right to worry that *if* Kant simply meant that *all* extra-intuitive judgments were illegitimate, he would be excluding many universally accepted explanatory judgments. But I have shown that Kant could easily accept extra-intuitive judgments as legitimate provided that they are conditioning judgments. This would mean that the judgment that God exists is illegitimate (at least) insofar as it is the conclusion of the ontological argument.

### **C. That Conditioning Judgments Must Not Be Unconditioned**

The first restriction on extra-intuitive judgments, then, is that in order to be legitimate they must be conditioning and not made for the sake of satisfying some interest. Thus, it is worth noting that some traditional metaphysical judgments – the kind Kant wants to reject – *are*

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<sup>98</sup> Anselm. *The Major Works*. Edited with an introduction and notes by Brian Davies and Gillian Evans. Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1998 ed.

conditioning judgments. For example, although I have only considered the ontological argument for God's existence, it is also possible to argue for God's existence as a theoretical attempt to account for some feature of experience. This is what Aristotle does when he argues for the Unmoved Mover, since the purpose of positing the Unmoved Mover is to account for the phenomenon of motion in general.<sup>99</sup> Of course, Aristotle's actual argument has some dramatically untrue premises, such as his belief that all heavenly motion is circular. But we are not concerned with whether the judgment results from a sound argument, but whether he has a right to this judgment (*quid juris*).<sup>100</sup> It might seem that he does have this right, just as much as the scientist has a right to posit magnetic force for the sake of making sense of certain motions. This same reasoning can be extended to include existential judgments about the soul. It is one thing when the religious believer makes one for the sake of accounting for his belief in immortality, but, as we have seen, Aristotle's doctrine of *nous* is his valiant attempt to account for experience.<sup>101</sup> And again, whether Aristotle's argument is sound is not relevant here. What this means is that if Kant wishes to maintain his attack on metaphysics, he must introduce another condition for legitimate judgments. I argue that the Transcendental Dialectic provides such a condition.

In the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant is not focused on the nature of legitimate judgment as such, but rather aims to discover why human reason often attempts to ascend dialectically the chain of syllogisms to reach an unconditioned judgment. Kant claims that despite the

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<sup>99</sup> *Metaphysics* 1071b2-1071b11

<sup>100</sup> This is particularly important because there have been attempts, notably by Aquinas and continuing in contemporary philosophy of religion, that attempt to reformulate this argument without using obviously false premises. One difference is that unlike Aristotle, Aquinas and contemporary philosophers of religion are motivated to make this argument by their religious faith. However, they are in fact giving a judgment that, if true, would unify experience. Thus, they have the same right to their argument that Aristotle does, and this is thus quite unlike Anselm's argument.

<sup>101</sup> *Nous* is much closer to what some call mind or soul than Aristotle's concept of 'soul' is, since Aristotelian soul is merely the essence of the body.

complexities, the basic presupposition (which leads to a misuse of reason) exposed by the Transcendental Dialectic is fairly straightforward: “[i]f the conditioned is given, then the whole series of all conditions for it is also given” (A497/B525). The pre-critical ontologist believes that because conditioned objects are in fact given to us in sensibility, reason should be able to ascend to the unconditioned because the unconditioned - that is, the final judgment grounding the series of conditions - must also be given. Kant names the position that leads reason on this misguided quest ‘transcendental realism,’ which ignores the warnings given by transcendental idealism.

The transcendental realist believes in the existence of the external world, which requires her to make “modifications of our sensibility into things subsisting in themselves” (A491/B519). Thus, transcendental realism is simply rooted in the failure to appreciate that space and time are the conditions of sensibility, which according to Kant, implies that they are not features of the world in-itself. If this mistake is made, then it follows that when appearances are given, they are conditioned entirely by external, mind-independent reality; so to speak, space and time are presented to us by reality. Therefore the conditioned objects subsist in themselves, and are given to us on occasion of our having some experience of them. But transcendental idealism holds that “the objects of experience are never given in themselves, but only in experience, and they could never exist at all outside it” (A492/B521). The conditions of space and time come not from reality, but from the one doing the experiencing.

If one presupposes transcendental realism, then one has presupposed that any given object is conditioned by reality. Given such a presupposition, it is not only understandable but logically necessary to believe that the unconditioned is also given:

[i]f the conditioned as well as its condition are things in themselves, then when the first is given not only is the regress to the second given as a problem, but the latter is thereby really already given along with it; and, because this holds for all members of the series, then the complete set of conditions, and hence the unconditioned is thereby



simultaneously given, or rather it is presupposed by the fact that the conditioned, which is possible only through that series, is given (A498/B526).

One point highlighted here is that how one interprets the judgment ‘the unconditioned is therefore also given’ is what determines whether one accepts transcendental idealism. In one sense, this judgment is analytically true since “the concept of the conditioned already entails that something is related to a condition, and if this condition is once again conditioned, to a more remote condition, and so through all the members of the series” (A487/B526). So it is at least true by definition that the unconditioned is given to us *as a problem*, although the further inference that the unconditioned condition is a feature of reality is the very assumption that Kant wishes to expose. When the conditioned is given in appearance, reason finds itself bound by a subjective law: “[f]ind for the conditioned knowledge given through the understanding the unconditioned whereby its unity is brought to completion” (A308/B364).

The distinction between the unconditioned being given to us and being given to us as a problem is the same distinction that Kant highlights by characterizing the two ways to take this law, namely either as objective or subjective (A306/B363). Kant’s characterization of this principle as a law suggests that reason does not have a choice but to follow it. This is indeed what Kant means by labeling this as a special type of error; he calls it the doctrine of transcendental illusion. This is why Michelle Grier says that “Kant’s view is that the transcendental principle that states that an unconditioned unity is already given is itself a rational assumption that must be made if we are to secure unity of the understanding and knowledge” (Grier 123).<sup>102</sup>

Thus, accepting the idea of the unconditioned is a transcendental condition for giving unity to experience, and as such, we finite creatures always find ourselves under illusion. But if

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<sup>102</sup> Grier, Michelle. *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001 ed.

we become transcendental idealists, we can understand that this principle cannot be used to acquire theoretical knowledge. Kant highlights this conviction in a series of rhetorical questions:

[t]ake the principle, that the series of conditions... extends to the unconditioned. Does it or does it not have objective applicability?...Or is there no such objectively valid principle of reason, but only a logical precept, to advance toward completeness by an ascent to ever higher conditions and so to give our knowledge the greatest possible unity or reason? (A309/B366).

Kant is reviving the distinction he made in the Transcendental Deduction between what is subjectively necessary and what is objectively valid. The law that requires reason to seek the unconditioned is classified as a law because it is necessary for subjective experience. It is not, however, for that reason objectively valid. Once we realize this, we must relinquish whatever theoretical knowledge we have previously assumed we had gained through this process. Making judgments about the unconditioned, then, is illegitimate because it assumes that the unconditioned is a feature of reality. This, then, is Kant's doctrine of legitimate judgments.

#### **D. Should We Believe Kant's Doctrine of Legitimate Judgments?**

In Chapter 4, I showed *how* Kant's analysis of cognition leads him to his doctrine of (partial) spontaneity, *how* spontaneity implies epistemic limits, and *how* epistemic limits in turn imply Kant's radical redefinition of the limits of reason. In 5.D, I underscored that Kant's account of spontaneity is unique because it is *a priori* spontaneity, and this is a consequence of his denial of intellectual intuition. This, however, does not at all settle the matter of *whether* Kant is justified in believing that intellectual intuition is impossible for human cognition. In order to evaluate Kant's position on intellectual intuition, I have been examining Kant's doctrine of legitimate judgments. The DLJ says that judgments may only use concepts that either 1) arise from objects given in sense experience, 2) make experience possible, or 3) are concepts necessary for use in conditioning judgments. This entire doctrine, of course, is built on the

Kantian principle that the understanding has an empirical use in unifying what is given in sense intuition, and not a transcendental use in intuiting objects.

For his part, Kant certainly believes that his discussion of legitimate judgment has proven that intellectual intuition is impossible:

[a]fter what has been shown in the deduction of the categories, hopefully no one will be in doubt about how to decide the question, whether these pure concepts of the understanding are of merely empirical or also a transcendental use, i.e., whether, as conditions of possible experience, they relate *a priori* solely to appearances, or whether, as conditions of possibility of things in general, they can be extended to objects in themselves (without any restriction to our sensibility)... (A139/B178).

That is, Kant has proven to his own satisfaction that the pure concepts of the understanding do not have a transcendental use because *noumenal* objects are not “given to the understanding” by means of an intellectual intuition (A257/B313). For the sake of argument, let us grant the success of the transcendental deduction, which is clearly the most difficult part of the DLJ. Thus, we will say that Kant has indeed proven that the categories *do* have an *a priori* empirical use. But how has anything Kant has said so far proven that the categories *do not* have a transcendental use? What, exactly, is the problem with supposing that objects may be given to the understanding? It seems that Kant’s denial of intellectual intuition implies his position on legitimate judgments, and his DLJ implies that intellectual intuition is impossible. But where is the independent proof that Kant is right about all of this?

Kant sheds some insight into how he answered this question for himself in a letter to Marcus Herz. There, he reminisced about his pre-critical days, when he believed that “[t]he sensuous representations present things as they appear, the intellectual representations present them as they are” (CK 10:130). The way he talked about the given-ness of intellectual representations was more or less typical of a rationalist, and already far away from general empiricism: [i]n my dissertation I was content to explain the nature of intellectual representations

is a merely negative way, namely, to state that they were not modifications of the soul brought about by the object...[i.e.] the way in which they affect us...” (CK 10:130). This is, in other words, simply to deny that any of the categories are “caused by the object...” (CK 10:130). Sometime after that, Kant second-guessed his own project: “[h]owever, I silently passed over the further question of how a representation that refers to an object without being in any way affected by it is possible” (CK 10:130). Specifically, the question he passed over was this: “...by what means are these things given to us, if not by the way in which they affect us?” (CK 10:130).

Kant there implies that even as a pre-critical philosopher, it was obvious to him that intellectual objects cannot affect us. But this raises an important issue, for if we assume that intellectual representations refer to (*noumenal*) objects, and thus are “given to us,” yet do not affect us, “whence comes the agreement that they are supposed to have with objects...?” (CK 10:130). We can say positively that affection *is* an appropriate way to understand the relationship of sensibility to objects:

[i]f a representation is only a way in which the subject is affected by the object, namely, as an effect in accord with its cause, [then] it is easy to see how this modification of our mind can represent something, that is, have an object. Thus the passive or sensuous representations have an understanding relationship to objects (CK 10:130).

Kant’s epiphany in this 1772 letter is clearly imported to the first *Critique*.<sup>103</sup> The memorable opening lines of the *Critique* proper are:

[i]n whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which is related immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is intuition. This, however, only takes place insofar as the object is given to us; but this in turn, is possible only if it affects the mind in a certain way. *The capacity (receptivity) to acquire representations through the way in which we are affected by objects is called sensibility* (A19/B33, my italics).

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<sup>103</sup> I am not going to enter the notoriously difficult debate about Kant’s mature position on the possibility of affection by things in themselves. Here, I am merely drawing a link between Kant’s position on intellectual intuition in his letter to Herz (namely, that intellectual objects are intuited, but that mode of intuition is not affection) and the assumptions that must be present in the Transcendental Aesthetic.

It may seem that this is blatant dogma; why does Kant just assert that the only capacity that can be affected by objects is sensibility? Charles Parsons articulates this concern when he says that

[t]he capacity for receiving representations through being affected by objects is what Kant calls sensibility; that for us intuitions arise only through sensibility is thus something Kant was prepared to state at the outset. It appears to be a premise of the argument of the Aesthetic; if not Kant does not clearly indicate there any argument of which it is the conclusion (Parsons 66).<sup>104</sup>

Parsons is certainly right to observe that Kant does not ‘clearly indicate’ the argument that led him to his doctrine that all intuition is sensible intuition. But, as I have pointed out, Kant’s 1772 letter at least gives us his train of reasoning: all intuition is by means of affection, only sensible objects affect us, and therefore all intuition is sensible intuition.

Let’s leave aside Kant’s premise that ‘all intuition is by means of affection’ and focus on the second, as it is directly relevant for the dialogue I have been developing between Kant and Aristotle, namely, that ‘only sensible objects affect us.’ What has Aristotle said about affection that may be relevant here? If empiricism is simply the theory that objects make our representations of them possible, then Aristotle is an empiricist, for he also considers the object the cause and our representation of it the effect; Aristotle says that “before the mind intuits it is not any actual thing” (*DA* 429a23-4).<sup>105</sup> However, Aristotle’s notion of perception is more sophisticated than the empiricist account of perception that Kant addresses in the *Transcendental Analytic*, for Aristotle believes that intuition is not only of sensible but also intellectual forms. Charles Kahn argues that Aristotle makes this move because he believes, with Kant, that the intuition of sensation is indeterminate and cannot by itself account for experience. As Kahn

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<sup>104</sup> Parsons, Charles. “The Transcendental Aesthetic.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, edited by Paul Guyer. Cambridge University Press, 1992 ed.

<sup>105</sup> This is my own translation of “νοῦς...οὐθὲν ἐστὶν ἐνεργεῖα τῶν ὄντων πρὶν νοεῖν.” That this translation is justified is argued in Chapter 2.

explains, for Aristotle, “[i]f we were restricted to the reception of sensible forms, all we could perceive would be colors and shapes;” that is, in order to turn the sensible forms into experience, the sensibility must be “enriched by the conceptual resources provided by its marriage with nous” (Kahn 369).<sup>106</sup> This is what Aristotle means when he says that “one perceives an individual, but perception is of the universal – e.g. of man, but not of Callias the man” (*Post Analytics* 100a17).<sup>107</sup> Perception, for Aristotle, is thus of the particular thing (which imparts the sensible forms) *and also* of the universals in which it partakes (which impart the intellectual forms). In this way, the objects that νοῦς intuit, the intelligible forms, are necessarily intuited; if they were not, sense perception would not turn into meaningful experience.

It will be recalled that Kant’s criticism of empiricism focuses on the inability of the empiricist to explain the unity of sensation:

[u]nity of synthesis in accordance with empirical concepts would be entirely contingent, and, were it not grounded on a transcendental ground of unity, it would be possible for a swarm of appearances to fill up our soul without experience ever being able to arise from it (A111).

Determinateness must obtain of sensation if sensation is going to turn into even minimal experience. The empiricist, by thinking that sensation might be unified by empirical concepts, asks the impossible of raw sensation. Kant has recourse to the categories because he believes that this determinateness can be explained only if the *a priori* categories are involved in the synthesis, that is, if the synthesis has ‘a transcendental ground of unity’:

...the way in which sensibility presents its data to the understanding for its conceptualization already reflects a particular manner of receiving it, that is, a certain form of sensibly intuiting, which is determined by the nature of human sensibility rather

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<sup>106</sup> Kahn, Charles. “Aristotle on Thinking.” *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima*. Edited by Martha Nussbaum and Amelie Rorty. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, ed.

<sup>107</sup> *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Volume Two. Bollington Series LXXI.2; Princeton University Press. *Posterior Analytics* translated by Jonathan Barnes. 1984 ed.

than by the affecting objects...this form of sensibly intuiting conditions the possibility of its ordering by the understanding (Allison 14-15).<sup>108</sup>

Kant appreciates the problem of the indeterminacy of sensation and posits the *a priori* categories as the ground of the unity of sensation. Kant no doubt believes that this criticism catches Aristotle's epistemology as well. However, Aristotle sees the very same problem, but instead posits a passive intuition of the intellectual form of the object. It would be too weak, then, to say that Aristotle merely *avoids* Kant's criticism of the indeterminacy of sense data; it is more accurate to say that he *gives* this criticism.

By recognizing that sensation must be complemented by the intelligible form of the object in intuition, Aristotle is acknowledging that sensation is not determinate in its own right. Aristotle's doctrine of intellectual intuition is thus a sensible answer to the *quid juris* question because it explains the presence of intellectual representations of objects in our mind, but it does so by simple cause and effect; the cause of our intellectual representations is our encounter with the objects themselves. This, then, is intellectual intuition that is affective. As Aristotle concludes,

[t]he mental part of the soul must therefore be, while impassible, capable of receiving the form of an object [τὰ νοητά]; that is, must be potentially identical in character with its object without being the object. *Mind must be related to what is intelligible, as sense is to what is sensible* (DA 429a15-18, my italics).

Now it is certainly possible that Aristotle was wrong about all this; but it seems clear, as Parsons wrote in his notes on the Aesthetic and I observed in the letter to Herz, that Kant simply does not take seriously the possibility of affection by intellectual objects. It seems, then, that Kant's position that the philosophical tradition in general has misunderstood human cognition is not relevant for Aristotle. And, as I have argued, it is Kant's rejection of the possibility of

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<sup>108</sup> Allison republished and included some new content in a 2004 edition of *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, from which this quote is taken. Yale University Press: New Haven and London.

intellectual intuition that gives rise to his doctrine of *a priori* spontaneity, and his unique understanding of spontaneity that gives rise to his radical redefinition of the limits of human reason. Aristotle therefore is not obligated to yield to the conclusions either in the Transcendental Aesthetic or Analytic. However, as I will argue in Chapter 7, Kant's indirect argument from the antinomies sufficiently supports his position on the impossibility of intellectual intuition, and all that implies epistemologically.



## Chapter 7: “The Antinomial Attack on Metaphysics”

- A. *The Role of the Transcendental Dialectic.* The antinomies, unlike the paralogisms and ideal, offer a defense of transcendental idealism that, according to Kant, can be evaluated independently of any previous feature of his philosophy.
- B. *The Antinomial Attack on Metaphysics in the First Critique.* Here I introduce sections C-F, which explain Kant’s antinomial attack.
- C. *The Logic of a Dialectical Argument.* Kant characterized the dialectical use of logic as a misappropriation of logic by reason. While logic is useful for determining what must be false (insofar as it violates logical form), we cannot simply assume that it can also tell us what must be true. This claim, explained in E, is the mistake of using logic as an organon and not merely a canon of truth.
- D. *Antinomial Argument as Dialectical Conflicts.* The first feature of an antinomial argument is that certain propositions are contradictory if transcendental realism is presupposed.
- E. *Antinomial Arguments as Apagogical Arguments.* The second feature of an antinomy is in the way that it is argued for, namely, by accusing the contradictory position of being self-contradictory. Kant tried to warn us about the danger of this style of argument, because it does nothing to guard against the possibility that we will take what is subjectively necessary for what is objectively valid, which is the concern expressed in the canon/organon discussion in C.
- F. *Antinomial Arguments as Arguments Rooted in Experience.* The third relevant feature of an antinomial position is that it is rooted in an attempt to account for something given in experience.
- G. *The Antinomial Attack on Metaphysics in the Third Critique.* Sections C-F describe the antinomial attack as it exists in the first *Critique*. Kant also describes the antinomial attack in the third *Critique*, which is useful for my purposes because he invokes the *intellectus archetypus*.
- H. *Does the Antinomial Attack Present a Problem for Aristotle?* Here I review Aristotle’s argument for teleology in nature, and the way in which Kant’s antinomial attack undermines it.
- I. *Is the Antinomial Attack Successful as a Defense of Transcendental Idealism?* Here I show how the antinomial attack is problematic not just for Aristotle, but for the whole transcendental realist tradition.
- J. *A Return to the Intellectus Archetypus*
- K. *Conclusion: Two Conceptions of Non-Omniscience.*

### A. The Role of the Transcendental Dialectic

It is possible to believe that Kant is using the Transcendental Dialectic simply to show why typical arguments from the history of metaphysics are invalid. For example, the sentence that begins his critique of the metaphysical doctrine of the soul identifies the argument for the soul as a “transcendental paralogism,” which “has a transcendental ground for inferring falsely due to its form” (A341/B399). For example, if we expect to understand ourselves as substances, we may argue that “I, as a thinking being, am the absolute subject of all my possible judgments, and this representation of Myself cannot be used as the predicate of any other thing. Thus I, as thinking being (soul), am substance” (A348). The problem with that argument is that there is an equivocation on the concept ‘subject,’ and thus this syllogism only seems to extend our knowledge of ourselves if “it passes off the constant logical subject of thinking as the cognition of a real subject of inherence...” (A350). This syllogism, which has the initial look of validity, is invalid on closer inspection. In the ideal of pure reason, Kant first turns his attention to the ontological argument, since he believes that all arguments for the existence of God ultimately depend on the ontological argument.<sup>109</sup> The ontological argument, in essence, argues that the concept ‘God’ is inseparable from the predicate ‘being,’ in the same way ‘triangle’ is inseparable from ‘three-sidedness.’ However,

[b]eing is obviously not a real predicate, i.e., a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing... In the logical use it is merely the copula of a judgment. The proposition God is omnipotent contains two concepts that have their objects: God and omnipotence; the little word “is” is not a predicate in it, but only that which posits the predicate in relation to the subject” (A598/B626).

The arguments against the metaphysical claims about God or the soul are certainly important and interesting. However, they are not essentially related to Kant’s general epistemological project of transcendental idealism, for it is perfectly consistent to accept the

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<sup>109</sup> A607/B635, A630/B658

force of these arguments and yet reject transcendental idealism. Conversely, it is possible to be convinced of transcendental idealism and yet complain that while Kant's conclusions are correct, he has made some important mistakes in the paralogisms and ideal. No matter, the transcendental idealist would say, because God and the soul are still unconditioned concepts. Guyer summarizes:

...the chief result of Kant's own critical philosophy [is] that concepts yield knowledge only when applied to intuitions, and as a result...all ideas of the unconditioned are *fundamentally incompatible* with the structure of our sensible intuition, *which is always conditioned*...In other words, it is the most fundamental characteristic of our intuitions that they are always *conditioned* by further intuitions, and so nothing *unconditioned* can ever be "given"...Therefore nothing unconditioned can ever be an object of knowledge for us (Guyer 133, my italics).

Thus it is true that the failure of the paralogisms and the ideal do not indicate that transcendental realism has failed, and the success of those sections does not count in favor of its success. But the argument(s) in the second section of the Dialectic, the antinomies, are of a different character entirely. In this present chapter, I will argue that A) their success does in fact support transcendental idealism, and B) that they are in fact successful.

### **B. The Antinomial Attack on Metaphysics in the First Critique**

It is first important to note the asymmetry between the antinomies on the one hand and the paralogisms and ideal on the other. While the mistake of seeking an unconditioned judgment to ground conditioned judgments is common to all three sections of the Transcendental Dialectic, the antinomies are unique in at least two respects. They are first of all distinguished because they give this unconditioned judgment specifically to ground the "series of conditions of appearance" (A334/B391). Kant attempts to expose the root of attempts to reach the unconditioned in cosmological debates. His project is to demonstrate that contradictory positions on the four main

issues in cosmology can both be supported with sound arguments. Kant characterizes the four debates as follows (the first is in two parts):

...whether the world has been there from eternity or has a beginning; whether cosmic space is filled with beings ad infinitum or enclosed within certain bounds; whether anything in the world is simple, or whether everything can be divided as infinitum; whether there is a generation or production from freedom, or whether everything is attached to the chain of the natural order; and finally, whether there is some entirely unconditioned and in itself necessary being, or whether everything is, as regards its existence, conditioned and hence dependent and in itself contingent (B509).

But there is another way that the antinomies are distinct. Guyer's characterization of the project of the antinomies is helpfully concise:

Reason seeks the unconditioned in the series of objects in space and events in time (quantity), in the division of objects and events in space and time (quantity), in the series of causes and effects (relation), and in the dependence of contingent things or states upon something necessary (modality). And in each of these series, moreover, reason finds two incompatible ways of conceiving the unconditioned, thus generating the insoluble conflicts... (Guyer 133).

Unlike the paralogism and ideal, which argue that taking the unconditioned as a feature of mind-independent reality results in the beliefs in the soul and God respectively, here there are *two* ways of conceiving the unconditioned; furthermore, these two ways are contradictory.

This means that the antinomies are able to offer a critique of transcendental realism that is unavailable to the other sections of the Transcendental Dialectic. Karl Ameriks puts the matter this way in order to distinguish the antinomies from the claims made in both the paralogisms and ideal:

[c]osmological claims, on the other hand, get us into contradictory theses that are resolvable only by transcendental idealism... Here the problem is not one of a lack of knowledge or detail; rather, for [cosmological] questions... there simply is no sensible answer about an ultimate nature (Ameriks 254).

Kant himself appears to recognize this significance of the antinomies. In a letter, Kant reuses one of his most well-known sayings in the context of the antinomies: they “woke me from

my dogmatic slumbers” (CK 252).<sup>110</sup> Hume’s skepticism about cause and effect - the original epistemological alarm-clock - is well known, and the Transcendental Deduction, if sound, would restore optimism in knowledge of the sensible world. But the antinomies, when properly understood, should give rise to a *healthy* skepticism:

the dogmatic use of pure reason without critique...[leads] to baseless assertions that can always be opposed by others that seem equally plausible, and hence to skepticism...[A]ll attempts to answer these natural questions – e.g., whether the world has a beginning or has been there from eternity, etc. – have met with unavoidable contradictions” (B22-23).

Kant’s point is that the recognition of these contradictions should give us a clue that something is wrong with transcendental realism. Thus, the antinomies provide *indirect* support for transcendental idealism. This is why he says

[n]ow the propositions of pure reason, especially when they venture beyond all boundaries of possible experience, admit of no test by experiment with their objects...: thus to experiment will be feasible only with concepts and principles...If we now find that there is agreement with the principle of pure reason when things are considered from this two-fold standpoint, but that an unavoidable conflict of reason with itself arises with a single standpoint, then the experiment decides for the correctness of that distinction (bxviii-bxix fn).

Here and elsewhere<sup>111</sup> Kant argues that if a debate can be shown to generate contradictory judgments, then the very presuppositions of that debate would have to be discarded. And if we grant that transcendental realism supplies the presuppositions that generate the antinomies and that transcendental idealism is the contradictory position, then the antinomies will provide indirect support for transcendental idealism.

The result in each case is that we are forced to believe that the phenomenon in question cannot “exist in itself without relation to our senses and possible experience” (A493/B522). Kant summarizes the ideal pattern of discovery:

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<sup>110</sup> In a letter to Christian Garve: *The Cambridge Edition to the Works of Immanuel Kant: Correspondence of Immanuel Kant*. Translated and edited by Arnulf Zweig. Cambridge University Press, 1998 ed.

<sup>111</sup> A490-7/B 518-25

If the world is a whole existing in itself, then it is either finite or infinite. Now the first as well as the second alternative is false... Thus it is false that the world... is a whole existing in itself. From which it follows that appearances in general are nothing outside of our representation, which is just what we mean by their transcendental ideality (A507-8/B535-6).

Thus, Kant believes that the antinomies are unique among the three divisions of the Transcendental Dialectic because the antinomies provide a defense of transcendental idealism, while the arguments in the paralogisms and ideal do not. In order to evaluate to force of the antinomial attack, I will develop its meaning in sections C-G.

### **C. The Logic of a Dialectical Argument**

The antinomies come to exist because of the dialectical use of reason, which Kant will argue is always a misuse of reason. Kant's argument against the dialectical use of reason begins not when he turns in earnest to the topic in the Transcendental Dialectic but toward the beginning of the *Critique* in the section titled "On the division of general logic into analytic and synthetic." Kant begins by observing the importance and reliability of general logic. As such, the following premise summarizes Kant's view of logic:

P1. General logic provides the rules for generating formally acceptable judgments and valid arguments.

Given this, the temptation to make the following inference is overwhelming:

C2. Therefore general logic provides the rules for generating truth.

The conclusion seems innocent enough; after all, general logic certainly can be a guide for making claims in *some* cases. For example, general logic would relieve me of the empirical chore of finding out whether it is true, as you claim, that you are both in the room and not in the room at the same time and in the same sense. The simple reason is that your judgment has violated one the two central principles of general logic – the law of non-contradiction, and thus,

the *form* of the claim is wrong. Together with the law of the excluded middle, these provide the ultimate criteria for judging and inferring.

The problem, as Kant points out, is that such “criteria concern only the form of truth, i.e., of thinking in general, and are to that extent entirely correct but not sufficient” (A59/B84). So while we were justified in allowing the rules of general logic to tell us what must be *false* because it violates logical form (as in the case of your claim about being in the room and not in the room), no rules of logic can tell us the content of what is *true*: [t]he merely logical criterion of truth...is therefore certainly the...negative condition of all truth; further, however, logic cannot go, and the error that concerns not form but content cannot be discovered by a touchstone of logic” (A59/60-B84). Logic is therefore “the negative touchstone of truth;” it is negative because it can only tell us what claims about reality must be untrue, and it is a ‘touchstone’ because “one must before all else examine and evaluate by means of these rules the form of cognition before investigating its content in order to find out whether...it contains positive truth” (A60/B84-5). In the end, then, this is general logic in its analytic employment, since in this way “[g]eneral logic analyzes the formal business of the understanding and reason...” (A60/B84).

However, general logic has a siren-like quality, and thus is liable to misappropriation:

Nevertheless there is something so seductive in the possession of an apparent art for giving all of our cognitions the form of understanding...that this general logic, which is merely a canon for judging, has been used as if it were an organon for the actual production of at least the semblance of objective assertions, and thus in fact it has thereby been misused. Now general logic, as a putative organon, is called dialectic (A61/B85).

Premise 1 above refers to the general use of logic as analytic and formal - a tool for eliminating judgments and inferences that violate the rules for thinking. But as Kant understands it, our realization that we possess the *a priori* rules for judging and inferring makes us power-hungry. General logic is properly a *canon* for judging and inferring the form of truth; we, however, use it

to generate positive truth claims. General logic thus becomes an *organon* of truth. In other words, we pass silently from premise 1 to conclusion 2 without any attempt to justify our right to do so. Kant adds, somewhat cryptically, that “even if a cognition accorded completely with its logical form, i.e., if it did not contradict itself, it could still contradict its object” (A59/B84). He has already explained the first part of this statement – we know a proposition is false when its form is invalid – but how could cognition ‘contradict its object?’ Although Kant will not clarify his last remark until later on in the *Critique* (discussed in section E), it is certainly clear that he wants to establish “a critique of the understanding and reason in regard to their hyperphysical use” (A63/B88); that is, while the understanding and reason are necessary for experience (this is apparently their ‘physical’ use), they are also used beyond experience.

#### **D. Antinomial Arguments as Dialectical Conflicts**

By the time Kant turns to the actual Transcendental Dialectic, he identifies not one but three ways in which logic is subject to this dialectical misappropriation, treated separately in three sub-divisions of the Transcendental Dialectic. Since Kant has insisted that the antinomies generate an independent argument for transcendental idealism, that particular dialectical misappropriation is relevant here. So what is an antinomy? We have seen Kant identify four theoretical<sup>112</sup> antinomies in the first *Critique*,<sup>113</sup> but without a rigorous definition of an antinomial argument, Kant has left us the task of finding the commonalities in these disputes. In D, E, and F, I identify three different features of an argument that seem to motivate Kant to classify it as antinomial.

First, these positions must be contradictory and not contrary (or sub-contrary), and this is everywhere emphasized by Kant. In fact, if the two traditional positions could be reclassified as

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<sup>112</sup> Kant also considers what he calls ‘practical antinomies’ in the second *Critique*. My discussion of antinomies will be limited to the theoretical ones.

<sup>113</sup> B509



contraries within the context of transcendental realism then these debates would be completely useless to Kant; it is specifically their transgression of the subjective rules of judging and inferring that we find our clue that some presupposition made by the arguers is wrong. For example, it is not interesting if we are arguing over the hygiene practices of Europeans, and you are able to prove your proposition that “Some French citizens smell good” and I can just as well prove my proposition that “Some French citizens do not smell good;” the obvious truth is that we are both right, and this is because our positions are sub-contrary, and not contradictory, as we may have believed at first. However, the fact that the opposed propositions ‘The world had a beginning in time’ and ‘The world did not have a beginning in time’ can both be supported is quite interesting; it should indicate that the presuppositions of our debate are wrong.

In this context, Kant argues that an antinomy *never* presents a genuine contradiction: “[p]ermit me to call such an opposition a dialectical opposition, but the contradictory one an analytical opposition” (A504/B532). The contradictions of the antinomies are not genuine contradictions, but rather mere ‘dialectical oppositions’ because the contradiction is removed by removing the presupposition of transcendental realism. In the case of the first antinomy, “...if I take away this presupposition,...and deny that [the world] is a thing in itself, then the contradictory conflict of the two assertions is transformed into a merely dialectical conflict...because the world...exists neither as an in itself infinite whole nor as an in itself finite whole” (A505/B533). Thus, without the presupposition of transcendental realism, these apparent contradictions are properly classified as contraries. Therefore, the positions in a debate may be both false (as in the first two antinomies) or both true (as in the last two antinomies); these oppositions are acceptable to logic.

### E. Antinomial Arguments as Apagogical Arguments

In addition to being contradictories, the proof of one position must consist of an attempt to undermine the other position. Kant sometimes calls this style of proof ‘apagogical,’ as he does when naming the rules for pure reason at the end of the first *Critique*: “[reason’s] proofs must never be apagogic but always ostensive...[T]he apagogic proof...can produce certainty, to be sure, but never comprehensibility of the truth in regard to its connection with the ground of its possibility” (A789/B817). Kant, by further associating apagogical proofs with ‘modus tollens’ arguments (A791/B819), identifies apagogical arguments as those that find a contradiction in the rival argument. The form of a modus tollens is ‘If  $p$  (in this case, my opponent’s position), then  $q$ ; not  $q$  (because  $q$  is self-contradictory or at least absurd); therefore not  $p$ .’

This sort of indirect argument was precisely what Kant was concerned with earlier in the *Critique* when he warned against the negative use of logic. There he said “even if a cognition accorded completely with its logical form, i.e., if it did not contradict itself, it could still contradict its object” (A59/B84). Now, at the end of the *Critique*, Kant is in position to be clearer about how a cognition could contradict its object. He first asks us to consider a discipline where this sort of contradiction never happens: “In mathematics this subreption is impossible; hence apagogic proof has its proper place there” (A792/B820). The subreption to which he refers is the mistake of taking what is subjectively necessary for what is objectively valid. In mathematics, “it is impossible to substitute that which is subjective in our representations for that which is objective...” (A791/B819). Since mathematical objects are constructed by us, confusion between what is subjective and what is objective is impossible. Kant clearly suggests a contrast between mathematics and metaphysics in that while mathematicians are justified in the use of apagogic proofs, metaphysicians are not. The reason is that in metaphysics it *is* possible ‘to substitute that

which is subjective in our representation from that which is objective.’ Unlike mathematical objects, we do not construct objects in the world as they are in themselves. This is just another way to describe the mistaken presupposition of transcendental realism because this position mistakes the subjective for objective by treating objects as we imagine them to be apart from our experience of them.

Besides mathematics, Kant mentions another discipline that may use apagogic proofs, namely, natural science. But there is one important difference between the permissibility of apagogical logic in math and science, for while in mathematics its use is completely safe, it is not so in science; it only *tends* to be safe because there are other safeguards: “In natural science, since everything there is grounded on empirical intuitions, such false pretenses can frequently be guarded against through the comparison of many observations; but this kind of proof itself is for the most part unimportant in this area” (A792/B820). Kant’s point is that the danger of an apagogical proof is mitigated in natural science because a future observation may make it obvious that the apagogical argument in question was wrong. But since metaphysical judgments are not liable to refutation by what is given in experience, there is no warning bell.

#### **F. Antinomial Arguments as Arguments Rooted in Experience**

There is at least one other notable similarity that Kant emphasizes, namely, the rootedness of antinomial arguments in experience; that is, they begin with a phenomenon. As Kant says, “[t]he entire antinomy of pure reason rests on this dialectical argument: If the conditioned is given, then the whole series of conditions for it is also given; now objects of the senses are given as conditioned; consequently, etc.” (A497/B525). Whether it be our awareness of space and time, our observation of orderly causal processes, or our discovery of the (at least partial) divisibility of substances, antinomial arguments always begin with evidence that seems

to demand a verdict. Kant is sympathetic with this idea, for the evidence - that which is conditioned - is certainly “given to us as a problem” (A498/B526). But only those who presuppose transcendental realism go on to infer that because it is given to us as a problem, it is given to us independently of the conditions of our sensibility and exists apart from our experience of it. In this way, our dialectical ascension begins with a phenomenon, and because of the presupposition of transcendental realism, ends in the only place where the realist can be satisfied: a theoretical judgment about the unconditioned condition.

Kant’s identification of one particular antinomial offender has the effect of emphasizing that the antinomies are rooted in experience: “...the famous Leibniz constructed an intellectual system of the world...by comparing all objects only with the understanding and the formal concepts of its thinking (A270/B326). That means that if we follow Leibniz,

...we reflect merely logically, [and] we simply compare our concepts with each other in the understanding, seeing whether two of them contain the very same thing, whether they contradict each other or not, whether something is contained in the concept internally or is added to it, and which of them should count as given and which as a manner of thinking of that which is given” (A279-B335).

Kant takes these remarks to be illustrative of Leibniz’ many metaphysical arguments, including this one about the nature of space and time:

If I would represent outer relations of things through the mere understanding, this can be done only by means of a concept of their reciprocal effect, and I should connect one state of the one and the same thing with another state, then this can only be done in the order of grounds and consequences. Thus..space [is] a certain order in the community of substances, and...time [is] the dynamical sequence of their states (A275/B331).

The general pattern is this: we begin with a given; in this case, the phenomenon of space (or time). Then we begin seeking to account for the given. That is, we attempt to identify what *must be true* in order to explain the phenomenon at hand (the necessary conditions), and this is done through a process of logical reflection. We finish by articulating an unconditioned ground for the

appearance in question; that is, we characterize “the inner constitution of things...”

(A270/B326). Leibniz certainly believed that his mundane familiarity with the phenomenon of space together with his impressive familiarity with the rules of logic allow him safely to infer that the inner nature of space is ‘a certain order in the community of substances,’ and not some kind of container as his rivals believed.<sup>114</sup> Grier gives an apt summary:

Kant’s criticisms of Leibniz in the Amphiboly chapter are designed to undermine the attempt to draw substantive metaphysical conclusions about things in general (Dinge überhaupt) simply from the highly abstract concepts of reflection and/or principles of general or formal logic (e.g. the principle of contradiction) (Grier 71).

Kant’s central point is that Leibniz happily ascends the ladder of inferences, carefully using the rules of logic to add one rung at a time as he goes, and arrives at the unconditioned condition of the given phenomenon. There are thus three relevant features of an antinomial argument: the apparent contradiction (i.e. dialectical opposition) of the positions, the apagogic support for the positions, and the rootedness of the positions in the attempt to explain some feature of experience.

### **G. The Antinomial Attack on Metaphysics in the Third *Critique***

Kant has said that careful attention to the existence of antinomial principles demonstrates transcendental idealism:

If the world is a whole existing in itself, then it is either finite or infinite. Now the first as well as the second alternative is false... Thus it is false that the world... is a whole existing in itself. From which it follows that appearances in general are nothing outside of our representation, which is just what we mean by their transcendental ideality (A507-8/B535-6).

In sections C-F, I showed why Kant argues in the first *Critique* that the existence of the antinomies supports the inference to transcendental idealism. Kant revisits this attack and clarifies it considerably in this third *Critique*. For my purposes, Kant’s additional comments are

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<sup>114</sup> See *Correspondence: G.W. Leibniz and Samuel Clarke*. Edited with an introduction by Roger Ariew. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2000.

worthwhile because he is explicit how the antinomial arguments relate to our finitude and why an *intellectus archetypus* would not have the problem of the antinomies.

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant argues that there are two functions of the power of judgment, distinguished by how they stand in regard to principles. One type of judgment is determinative judgment: “[t]he determining power of judgment by itself has no principles that ground concepts of objects. It is no autonomy, for it merely subsumes under given laws or concepts as principle” (*CJ* 5:385). Since the determining power of judgment uses laws or principles that are *not* of its own making, Kant says that it is *not* ‘nomothetic.’ Kant anticipates the coming sections by pointing out an advantage that comes from merely following (and not creating) laws, namely, that the determining power of judgment “could never fall into disunity with itself...” (*CJ* 5:386).

Since principles (or laws) that ground concepts are *given to* the determining power of judgment, we may ask, ‘from where are they given?’ The answer from the transcendental realist would be ‘from the world as it is in itself.’ Kant is here testing this presupposition. Here in the third *Critique* he considers in particular the principles of mechanism and teleology:

...if one were to transform these...into constitutive principles of the possibility of the objects themselves, they would run: Thesis: All generation of material things is possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws. Antithesis: Some generation of such things is not possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws (*CJ* 5:387).

According to Kant, this contradiction can be resolved only by abandoning the presupposition that these are “objective principles for the determining power of judgment” (*CJ* 5:387). So if these are not objective principles gleaned from our observation of the operation of world as it is in itself, where else could they have come from?

It is not possible to believe that the principles do not exist. The mere fact that we are judging rules this out, for “no use of the cognitive faculties can be permitted without principles”

(*CJ* 5:385). The last possibility, then, is that the principles are features of the power of judgment itself, although not in its determinative capacity, for the determining power of judgment “merely subsumes under given laws or concepts as principles” (*CJ* 5:385). This points to a special power of judgment: “...the reflecting power of judgment must serve as a principle itself...” (*CJ* 5:385). It is obvious that the principle of mechanism is necessary for judging natural objects. But Kant argues that the principle of teleology is also necessary for judging: “...we must...apply this maxim of judgment to the whole of nature...given the limitations of our insights into the inner mechanisms of nature, which otherwise remain hidden from us” (*CJ* 5:398).

Therefore the principles of teleology and mechanism are necessary, but only “necessary...for the sake of cognition of natural laws in experience...” (*CJ* 5:385). This has the effect of removing the contradiction between the principles of mechanism and teleology because “[i]t is only asserted that human reason, in the pursuit of this reflection and in this manner” must use these principles for reflecting on nature, and “reflection in accordance with the first maxim is not thereby suspended, rather one is required to pursue it as far as one can” (*CJ* 5:387-8). Kant’s point is that conceiving ends in nature is not anti-scientific, nor a relic from a religiously-motivated physics. Rather, it is a necessary presupposition of human cognition, which understands nature through the power of judgment. In the end, then, this mistake “rests on confusing a fundamental principle of the reflecting with that of the determining power of judgment...” (*CJ* 5:389). To be sure, it will never be easy to convince the transcendental realist that neither teleology nor mechanism is a principle of nature in itself. However, the one who refuses to abandon the presupposition of transcendental realism is forced to explain how it is possible that nature gives us contradictory principles. The transcendental idealist, however, owes no such explanation.

In this way, Kant believes that the presupposition of transcendental realism, namely, that reality gives us the principles such mechanism and teleology for our determinative judgment, is unsustainable; they must, then, be reflective principles. This is the antinomial attack as expressed in the third *Critique*. We are now in position to evaluate the relevance of the antinomial attack for Aristotle. As I showed in Chapter 6, this is important because although Aristotle makes many judgments that Kant calls ‘illegitimate,’ it does not appear that either of Kant’s justifications for his doctrine of legitimate judgments is relevant for Aristotle.

#### **H. Does the Antinomial Attack Present a Problem for Aristotle?**

Aristotle’s argument for teleology in nature is paradigmatic of what Kant has been complaining about. The argument begins with a question Aristotle poses to himself: “...why should nature not work, not for the sake of something...but of necessity?” (*Ph* 198b15).<sup>115</sup> Aristotle is considering the two ways that a cause and its effect may be related: either the effect is the goal of the cause (and causal process), or it is not.<sup>116</sup> An initial observation is that in some cases, such as rain causing plant growth, it is clear that the effect (growth) is not the goal of the cause (rain): “[w]hat is drawn up must cool, and what has been cooled must become water and descend, the result of this being that corn grows” (*Ph* 198b19-20). If anyone would disagree that this is a mechanistic process, then he would also be obligated to believe that, for example, when that same rain storm spoiled crops on the threshing floor, the rain fell for the sake of ruining the crops (*Ph* 198b20-22).

Because a mechanistic analysis is quite sensible in this case, the physicist may be tempted to make it in the case of not just some but all natural events. She would then hold this

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<sup>115</sup> *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Volume One. Bollington Series LXXI.2; Princeton University Press. *Physics* translated by R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye.

<sup>116</sup> Since these two ways to see the relationship between cause and effect represent teleology and mechanism, respectively, I take it that Aristotle’s distinction is identical to the one Kant considers.



proposition: “[a]ll generation of material things is possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws” (*CJ* 5:387). Aristotle, of course, plans to argue the contradictory position that “[s]ome generation of such things is not possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws” (*CJ* 5:387). Aristotle reasons that if the effect is not the goal of the causal process, then the effect always arises through chance and spontaneity. This, however, is not faithful to our observation of the way that nature actually works: “natural things either invariably or for the most part come about in a given way; but of not one of the results of chance and spontaneity is this true” (*Ph* 198b35-199a1). The way we know that an effect is the coincidental result of a causal process is that the effect doesn’t happen often. Natural things, however, are generated with regularity.

Aristotle concludes:

[i]f then, it is agreed that things are either the result of coincidence or for the sake of something, and these things cannot be the result of coincidence or spontaneity, it follows that they must be for the sake of something... Therefore action for an end is present in things which come to be and are by nature” (*Ph* 199a3-5).

Aristotle said it perfectly: his argument works *if* it is agreed that teleology and mechanism are the only possibilities for how nature in itself works; or, as Kant says, *if* they are “constitutive principles of the possibility of things themselves...” (*CJ* 5:387). That, of course, is the ‘if’ that Kant exploits. What Aristotle *has* done is to show that mechanism, as a constitutive principle, is unable to account for the generation of all nature’s effects. We may note that Kant agrees with this conclusion: “with respect to our cognitive faculty, it is just as indubitably certain that the mere mechanism of nature is also incapable of providing an explanatory ground for the generation of organized beings” (*CJ* 5:389). Kant’s complaint is about what Aristotle has *not* done, which is to defend his own position directly by offering any kind of explanation of how teleology might work. As Kant has pointed out, metaphysical arguments must work to avoid this danger because we are not doing math, but metaphysics; in mathematics, “it is impossible to

substitute that which is subjective in our representations for that which is objective...”

(A791/B819). In metaphysics, however, subreption is possible. Therefore, in order for Aristotle to deliver a decisive proof that he has not confused the subjective principles with objective ones, he must argue for teleology in nature directly and not by resorting to an apagogical argument.

Kant is now in position to ask whether the principle of teleology is constitutive of things themselves, or whether it is a nomothetic law, created by the reflective power of judgment for the sake of making judging possible. If it were not possible to construct an equally convincing argument for mechanism, we would not be able to answer Kant’s question. But, of course, the mechanist can produce equally convincing reasons to discard teleology. Thus, we can bring in Kant’s words from the first *Critique* concerning the conditions for holding the distinction between appearances and things in themselves: since “we now find...[that] an unavoidable conflict of reason with itself arises with a single standpoint,...the experiment decides for the correctness of that distinction” (bxviii-bxix fn). Thus, these principles are best conceived as regulative, at once necessary and nomothetic, created by the reflective power of judgment for use by the determining power of judgment.

### **I. Is the Antinomial Attack Successful as a Defense of Transcendental Idealism?**

In this way, the antinomial attack undermines this argument and Aristotle’s other metaphysical arguments insofar as they are apagogical. But perhaps this is unfair; perhaps if Aristotle had been aware of the danger of taking what is subjectively necessary for what is objectively valid, he would have constructed his arguments in such a way as to avoid these dangers. Another way of stating this concern is to wonder whether Kant’s attack, even though it presents a problem for the historical Aristotle, also presents a problem for the entire tradition of transcendental realism. Perhaps the most obvious way for the transcendental realist to proceed is

by noticing a necessary premise in Kant's argument: in regard to teleology and mechanism, he says that "...reason can prove neither the one nor the other of these fundamental principles..." (5:387). But perhaps this is just false, and reason *could* produce a proof; the fact that it has not yet been done does not by itself mean that it will never be done.

In order to evaluate the general success of the antinomial attack, we may begin by posing this question: 'What would count as an argument that would undermine Kant's attack?' When Kant states that reason cannot prove either of these principles, he obviously does not mean that reason cannot support these principles in *any* way, for reason often provides apagogical proofs of one or the other of these principles. Successfully using reason in this way, however, does not offer evidence that transcendental realism is true, since an *apagogical* proof could never rule out the possibility that these principles are not merely necessary for judgment. Kant means, then, that reason cannot support either premise with an *ostensive* proof. So could there be an ostensive argument for, say, teleology or mechanism? I think the answer is 'yes;' I am aware of no logical principle that rules out the possibility that some über-philosopher may come along and make this sort of argument.

Kant's argument, therefore, depends on a premise that is falsifiable. While it is possible to see this as a weakness, it is better seen as a strength. Kant has developed a theory that the principles of mechanism and teleology are given to the determinate power of judgment by the reflective power of judgment, which he has argued is better than the theory that nature in itself gives these principles to the determinative power of judgment. Kant's theory would be falsified if someone produced an ostensive proof for mechanism or teleology, but no one has yet done so. This means that his theory is *falsifiable* without being *falsified*. This theory, therefore, is strong

in the same way that the theory of gravity is strong; the theory of gravity is also falsifiable, but that fact that nothing has actually happened to falsify it part of what makes it a good theory.

### **J. A Return to the *Intellectus Archetypus***

It is in the context of distinguishing the two powers of human judgment that Kant returns to the concept of the *intellectus archetypus*. The investigation into the powers of judgment has identified “a special character of our (human) understanding with regard to the power of judgment in its reflection upon things in nature” (*CJ* 5:406). But if this is the distinguishing mark of the kind of understanding with which we find ourselves, it must be distinguished from some other kind of understanding. In other words, since human understanding is a species of understanding, we have a right to wonder what other species of understanding are possible. Kant notes that this project is analogous to the one in the first *Critique*, where “we had to have in mind another intuition if we were to hold our own to be a special kind...” (*CJ* 5:405).

Our species of understanding is distinguished in part because of the way we are constrained to view the relationship between the particular and the universal:

[t]his contingency [in the constitution of our understanding] is quite naturally found in the particular, which the power of judgment is to subsume under the universal of the concepts of the understanding; for through the universal of our (human) understanding the particular is not determined... (*CJ* 5:406)

This is so because “it is contingent in how many different ways distinct things that nevertheless coincide in a common characteristic can be presented to our perception” (*CJ* 5:406). This contingency is due to the fact that our intuition is receptive, and thus our concepts depend on an act of receptivity in order to have objects.

There are two ways that the *intellectus ectypus* (human understanding) may proceed in judging nature; one way is from the parts of nature to the whole of nature. In this case, “a real whole of nature is to be regarded only as the effect of the concurrent moving forces of the parts”

(*CJ* 5:407). If we proceed in the opposite manner, from whole to parts, we are confined to “go from the analytical universal (of concepts) to the particular (of the given empirical intuition), in which it *determines* nothing of the latter, but *must expect* this determination for the power of judgment...” (*CJ* 5:407, my italics). Béatrice Longuenesse notes that these two ways represent the principle of mechanism and teleology, known by now as subjectively necessary principles of reflective judgment:

[t]he rule of mechanism is imposed upon our reflective power of judgment by the understanding in its distributive use, which proceeds from parts to whole. The rule of teleology is imposed upon our power of judgment by consideration of particular objects, which have to be understood from whole to parts. Both depend upon the discursive nature of our understanding (Longuenesse 174).<sup>117</sup>

This is how the understanding of an *intellectus ectypus* is constrained to operate.

However, since this is only one kind of understanding, we have a right to imagine

a complete spontaneity of intuition [which] would be a cognitive faculty distinct and completely independent from sensibility, and thus an understanding in the most general sense of the term[;] one can thus also conceive of an intuitive understanding (negatively, namely merely as not discursive), which does not go from the universal to the particular and thus to the individual (through concepts) (*CJ* 5:407).

This is the *intellectus archetypus*, a being whose intuition is not receptive and understanding is not discursive. For such an understanding, concepts would be useless:

since it is not discursive like ours but is intuitive, [it] goes from the synthetically universal (of the intuition of a whole as such) to the particular, i.e., from whole to the parts, in which, therefore, and in whose representation of the whole, there is no contingency in the combination of the parts (*CJ* 5:407).

As Longuenesse notes, both ways of proceeding (whole to parts, parts to whole) “depend upon the discursive nature of our understanding. *Both would be useless for an intuitive understanding, which would reveal their common ground*” (Longuenesse 174, my italics).

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<sup>117</sup> Longuenesse, Béatrice. *Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics*. Translated by Nicole J. Simek. Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 2007 ed.

It is obvious that Kant believes that judgments of mechanism and teleology are legitimate ones, provided that they are categorized as reflective (and hence subjective) and not determinative (and hence objective). While this is certainly true, Longuenesse is pointing to a more profound subjectivity:

...the very fact that determinative and reflective uses have to be distinguished in this way is a characteristic of our own finite, discursive understanding. In this sense, ... *both* determinative and reflective uses of our power of judgment are “subjective” (Longuenesse 173).

Thus, mechanism and teleology are both different reflective principles specifically because they are both necessary ‘from the point of view of man’ (this is the title of her chapter). The truth is that the human condition forces us to consider objects both from whole to parts and from parts to whole.

Specifically, Longuenesse notes that the culprit is receptivity:

[i]f we suppose an intellect for which concept and intuition are not distinct, an intellect which unlike ours does not depend on receptivity for the reference of its concepts to objects, then neither determinative judgment (which has to find the particular objects for a given general concept) nor reflective (which has to find universal concepts for given particular objects) have any use at all (Longuenesse 173).

Longuenesse emphasizes Kant’s point that this antinomy is generated specifically because of the conditions of our cognition. In this way, the antinomies are an important clue for understanding the nature of human non-omniscience. They simultaneously require us to recognize our human limits and that there is another possible cognition that is of a *different kind*: “[t]he supposition of an intuitive understanding which escapes the distinctions of our own understanding...is itself a supposition proper to an understanding such as ours” (Longuenesse 174). The *intellectus archetypus*, then, which I have argued is an omniscient intellect, cognizes not just more things than humans do, but cognizes them in a different way - intuitively. It is possible for us to recognize that such an intellect is theoretically possible, but it is not possible for us to cognize

things in the same manner, for we can only understand the world through judgment, whether determinative or reflective. An omniscient intellect, on the other hand, has no use for the power of judgment.

### **K. Conclusion: Two Theories of Non-Omniscience**

Aristotle recognizes sensible intuition, passive intellectual intuition, discursive reasoning, and active intellectual intuition (i.e. contemplation), while for Kant, humans only have sensible intuition and discursive reasoning. As I showed in Chapter 2, it is not particularly mysterious that Aristotle believes in the human capacity for active intellectual intuition since he first posits passive intellectual intuition; intellectual intuition becomes active when we intuit the forms which constitute the mind after our passive intuition of them. I showed in Chapter 3 and emphasized in Chapter 5 that this is important to my investigation because active intellectual intuiting is also divine mental activity; hence, the more one contemplates, the closer one is to having a thought life identical to God's. If Aristotle had been right about this, non-omniscience would be degree non-omniscience, since human contemplation could be measured by degrees of separation from omniscient contemplation.

Given that Aristotle's doctrine of contemplation is rooted in passive intellectual intuition, it was necessary to understand why Aristotle first posits that capacity. In Chapter 6.E, I showed that it was because Aristotle, like Kant, recognized that sensible intuition by itself could never turn into meaningful experience. Hence, Aristotle posited intellectual intuition in order to account for experience. Since intellectual representations of objects do not come by way of intellectual intuition for Kant, he explained the presence of intellectual representations in another way: "...they must have their origin in the nature of the soul" (CK 133).<sup>118</sup> As I pointed out in

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<sup>118</sup> And by agreeing with Aristotle that the mind does not come stocked with ideas, he cannot take the rationalist way out.

5.E, this means that in order to have intellectual representations of objects, we must first subject them to the epistemic conditions of space and time – the pure forms of human intuition – in order for them to be concepts; concepts are famously empty without intuited objects. But the fact that we have epistemic conditions is both a blessing and a curse; it is a blessing because it guarantees that knowledge is possible, and it is a curse because it also guarantees that whatever we experience does not exist in the spatio-temporal way in which we experience it.

Human cognition is thus bifurcated into intuition and understanding, such that intuition is never intellectual, and the understanding is never intuitive. This is the cognition of the *intellectus ectypus*, and it is essentially different from that of the *intellectus archetypus*; intellectual intuition and intuitive understanding are two ways of describing a single mode of cognition. If Kant is right about this, then non-omniscience is kind non-omniscience, since an *intellectus ectypus* and the *intellectus archetypus* are different kinds of cognition, and an *intellectus ectypus* must subject objects to epistemic conditions in order for them to be our objects. Conversely, if it is false, then non-omniscience is degree non-omniscience. Hence, everything depends on whether we can believe that there are such things as epistemic limits to human intuition – in Kant’s case, space and time – since these limits show that all human intuition is necessarily derived and sensible. I have argued in this present chapter that Kant’s antinomial attack supports such an inference.



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