

PLATO-KANT CANON IN THE ONTOLOGICAL COGNITION

Mihai D. Vasile^{*}

mdvasile@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The author tries to put in relief the consequences of Kant's dichotomy noumenon-phenomenon analyzed in the contemporary philosophy, in accordance with the total Being is partitioned in peculiar levels, in accordance with there are stated sharp conditions of existence.*

Keywords: *noumen-phaenomen distinction; transcendental cognition; suppositio terminorum doctrine; Plato's cavern myth; architectonics of pure reason.*

Georg Henrik von Wright became an important part of a philosophical tradition, namely the *Plato-Kant canon* renewed in the turn of the 20th century by Bertrand Russell, continued by the Russell's disciple, Ludwig Wittgenstein, improved by Wittgenstein's disciple, Georg Henrik von Wright with new ways to philosophize. As a Patriarch from the Finnish School to the new Millennium philosophy, Georg Henrik von Wright counts up his disciples, some famous like Jaakko Hintikka, Raimo Tuomela, Gabriel Sandu, Ilkka Niiniluoto; and others, latecomers. Striking the balance of all his work, Georg Henrik von Wright wrote in his *Intellectual Autobiography*: „To say that philosophy is explanation of conceptual intuitions is a peculiar way of seeing philosophy. It is the way I see it. This means not only: see what I do myself as a philosopher, but also: see the historical phenomenon of philosophy. Other philosophers may have seen things differently – but only a few of them articulated their views on this question. If I had become a philosopher in a different spirit I should perhaps have understood better and been able learn more from such men as, say, Plato or Spinoza or Hegel”.

In the discourse universe of the Finnish philosophical tradition concerning the *Plato-Kant canon*¹, a very interesting investigation is the question „How much Plato is in Kant?” and, consequently, a comparison between the Architectonics of the Cavern and the Architectonics of the Pure Reason. The answer is somewhat strange, that Plato wrote his dialogues *as if he* would have read Kant's *Critiques*. Between the starting point and the arrival, few meanings are offered about the ontological knowledge of a Kantian type, e.g. „*Being is what is worthy to be thought of; the nature ontology as an approach of the possibility conditions of the object and its cognition; the ontology of the human as a discourse about the possibility conditions of freedom and transcendence; the*

*** Professor Ph.D., - Pitești University.**

¹ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, New York, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 96.

ontology of the differences in Being; the ontology phenomenon” etc. Finally, it is to be proved that the logical-grammatical structures of Latin, as „quasi” translated into German by „als-ob”, constitute the ground of the whole Kantian critical edifice and also it is suggested that the contemporary philosophical currents are nothing else than alterations of the Kantian supposition theory.

Das-in-der-Welt-Sein in Kant. In Kant, Being is bringing into being by cognition, it is maintaining through duty and it is wrecking out of ignorance. The Being category is used here in its first immaculate meaning from the natural metaphysics. At most a connection is possible with Martin Heidegger’s discourse on Being in Kant: Being is what is worthy to be thought of². Kant’s doctrine on Being as a result of the ontological knowledge is the *unsaid* from his utterance, whose interpretation is called to bring into the light, yielding a limit in bringing about the nature of knowledge, bringing Being into consciousness.

The present investigation aims to prove this thesis not crossing the all Kantian work, but bidding the time upon a privileged place from the first *Critique*, where the Kantian *metanoia* (met#noia) on the knowledge problem is easier to grasp: the famous Architectonics of the Pure Reason. Identifying in the substance of the whole *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, this Architectonics allows to detect the discursive route of knowledge marked by three positions. The first one, prevailing in the Western metaphysical tradition, is the Plato canon expressed in the superb allegory of the cavern from the 5th book of *Politeia*. The second position is focused on the possibility conditions of the generic cognition, and the third one starts from reckoning up singly the possibility conditions of the object, and aims to solve „the strangeness” of the necessary agreement between the laws of the nature phenomena and the faculty of *Da Sein* in order to know the binding of the diverse *in genere*³.

The three positions are obvious from the fact that *not* the *ratio* between the object and the subject is prevailing in the Architectonics of the Pure Reason, but the likeness between Being („Das Sein”) as an aspect of the *noumenon* („Das Ding an sich”) and thinking as the possibility of knowledge, and it is like this in Plato’s Architectonics of the Cavern, where the power to call to mind and to suggest the Being lies both in the shining of the occurrence and the way of seeing *potentia* becomes possible⁴. The question is the same, but the answers seem different.

After Plato, Immanuel Kant unifies for the second time in the Western philo-

² Martin Heidegger, *La Thèse de Kant sur l’Être*, in *Questions II*, trad. de l’allemand par Kostas Axelos, Jean Beaufret, Walter Biemel, Lucien Braun, Henry Corbin, François Fédier, Gérard Granel, Michel Haar, Julien Hervier, Dominique Janicaud, Jean Lauxerois, Roger Munier, André Préau, Claude Roëls et Alphonse de Waelhens, Paris, Gallimard, 1968, p. 73.

³ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. By J.M.D. Meiklejohn, in: *Great Books in the Western World*, vol. 42, Robert Maynard Hutchins edition in chief, Chicago, London, Toronto, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1952, *Transcendental Doctrine of Elements*, Second Part, First Divis., Book I, Chap. II, Sect. II, § 22. *Transcendental Deduction of the universally possible employment in experience of the Pure Conceptions of the Understanding*, pp. 57-58.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *La doctrine de Platon sur la vérité*, in; *Questions II*, trad. de l’allemand par Kostas Axelos, Jean Beaufret, Walter Biemel, Lucien Braun, Henry Corbin, François Fédier, Gérard Granel, Michel Haar, Julien Hervier, Dominique Janicaud, Jean Lauxerois, Roger Munier, André Préau, Claude Roëls et Alphonse de Waelhens, Paris, Gallimard, 1968, p. 145.

sophy the two traditions of true knowledge, *i.e.* the way of *logos* and the way of *sophia*, but from a hopeless position for the epistemic subject enchained in a transcendentless universe, as the ontological transcendent is a no need supposition⁵. The comparison between the Architectonics of the Cavern and the Architectonics of the Pure Reason points out an astonishing likeness concerning the position of the epistemic subject. Both of the architectonics prove that *Da Sein* is involved in *Das Sein*; that there is a fundamental distinction between Cavern and Being to which the human being is equidistant; that if becoming exists, then its sense is to get out of the cavern towards the place of Being as Being of Beingness. But while Plato describes in his *Dialogues* aspects on this route, totally known by him, Immanuel Kant runs through each *Critique* a stage from the spiritual exemplary route. As a modern genius of the *Cavern*, Kant turns down the Plato's „Khere” (the issue out of the cavern), and, loyal to the Socratic imperative, turns to the subject. For Kant, the subject's place in the topology of the cavern is quite immaterial: in the underworld, bound in the cavern, or outside under the sun of the truth, the real knowledge means to meditate inside on, not to contemplate outside towards, it is an investigation of the way *how* the epistemic subject sets the being in order, giving to it the real, natural possibility of being. That is what the Being does.

At the end of his philosophical discourse Kant will have to usurp his starting theoretical position. When he states that the nature must be considered as if („als-ob”) it would be have been created by a supreme Being and a rational one in the highest degree⁶, Kant does nothing else than to state clearly what in Plato was only a supposition expressed in a mythical form: it is the expression of the identity between Being and thinking. The intimate link between the Plato's view and the Kantian doctrine becomes obvious if we think that Immanuel Kant substantiated to the named identity through the divine intellect („intellectus archetypus”), while Plato built it up through the idea of Good in the hypostasis of the divine Demiourgos.

The two ontologies. After Immanuel Kant, *Das-in-der-Welt-Sein* lasts at the same time as an ontological state, on the one hand and generating ontology, on the other hand, while the Kantian „als-ob” constitutes the maximum development of the suppositions about the ontic levels. Kant did not theorize the mental „als-ob” technique, nor invented it, but he took it over as such from the *suppositio terminorum* medieval doctrine, perfectly and completely expressed by William Ockham, using it in a scholarly manner as the background for his monumental crucial *Critique*, resizing the whole scholastic terminology and problems.

The starting point of the Kantian ontological approach was, as he confessed

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, in: *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 42, ..., *Introduction*, IV. *Judgement as a Faculty by which Laws are prescribed a priori*, p. 467.

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, *ibid.*, I. *Transcendental Doctrine of Elements*, *Second Part, Second Divis.*, B. II, Ch. III, *Appendix. Of the Ultimate End of the Natural Dialectics of Human Reason*, p. 201. Cf. Germ, ed. in: *Kant Sämtliche Werke in Verbindung mit O. Buck*, P. Gedan, W. Kinkel, F.M. Schiele, Th. Valentiner, herausgegeben von Karl Vorlander, erster Band nach der erster und zweiter original Ausgabe neu herausgegeben von Raymund Schmidt, Leipzig, 1930, Verlag von Felix Meiner, I. *Elementarlehre. II. Teil. II. Abt. II. Buck III. Hauptstück. VII. Abschnitt. Kritik aller spekulativen Theologie*, pp. 627-628.

himself⁷, the astonishment that there is some paradoxical dimension of knowledge, ruined by antinomies, an everlasting scandal of the human reason with itself. Being as Being of Beingness is necessary, and its necessity should be mirrored in the non-contradiction and the absolute necessity of knowledge. In spite of that, the epistemic subject disposes of the knowledge expressed through *analytical* and *synthetic judgments*. Immanuel Kant claims for himself the raising to the rank of the first importance of the philosophical discovery the general dichotomy of the judgments into *analytical* and *synthetic* ones, and particularly the notification of the strange existence in the inner side of the *synthetics* of the *a priori* synthetic judgments⁸. The absolute value of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, built up on the distinction between the analytical and the synthetic judgments, lies down in the fact that it shows what is worthy to be thought, *i.e.* it is ontological knowledge.

The banishment of metaphysics has its origin in the wrong interpretation of the Kantian architectonics and much less in the Francis Bacon work, as it is usually believed, because of Kant's *motto* added to the second edition of his first *Critique*: „*Baco de Verulamio. Instauratio magna. Praefatio*”. In all the pre-kantian architectonics, metaphysics is set up on the same rank with the nature sciences. In Aristotle, for example, philosophy is ranked near physics, both of them taking part in the heading of the theoretical doctrines, while in Bacon's classification, philosophy together with the other theoretical sciences constitute the doctrines of reason. Immanuel Kant is the first thinker who does not group together philosophy with the positive sciences, and the first philosopher for whom philosophy is a cognition, a „science” of another type than the sciences of nature, being in fact a turning, a swinging – *metanoia* (met+noia) or *Khere* – of thought on knowledge in order to appreciate and to pronounce a judgment upon its extent, meaning and value. In Kant's view, metaphysics is the theory about what is scientific in knowledge *in genere* and consequently it has an eminently critical function, but especially an ontological one, because it is the „science” about the connection of all knowledge with the essential scopes of the human reason, it is the legislator of the reason⁹, thus establishing two ontologies: the primary ontology about nature as a discourse on the possibility conditions of the object and its cognition; and the second ontology of the human as a discourse about the possibility conditions of liberty and transcendence. The hardest consequence of this ontological „cut” is that any kind of knowledge, in order to constitute itself as a science, must be ensured and endowed with a metaphysical background.

If the research is focused on the primary ontology, as in the first *Critique*, some paradoxical statements can be made as conclusions, but at the same time convertible terms as the primitive *analytical-synthetic* distinction. If thought is not taken into account, nothing can exist, being that none of the objects can cut

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Samtliche Werke, ...*, neunter Band, *Briefwechsel*, 1924, *An Christian Garve*, Königsberg, den 21^{sten} Sept. 1798, pp. 779-780.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason, ibid.*, *Introduction*, IV. *Of the Difference between Analytical and Synthetical Judgements*, p. 17.

⁹ Immanuel Kant, *ibid.*, *The Architectonics of Pure Reason*, p. 245.

off itself completely from its idea out of the epistemic subject, without that becoming nothingness. The borders of thought are also the borders of Being. I chose, for example, some striking statements referring to the manner of knowledge to create relative ontic realities¹⁰. Thus, *nature* is a creation of knowledge (the ontological one) and therefore it is guided by the subjective principle of apperception, depending on it in what concerns its lawlikeness. In the same way, *space* and *time* are conditions for the ontological possibility of objects, while *causation* is a category that unifies according to the law of reason the phenomena diversity, bestowing to them the universality and totality character.

The difference in the epistemological value among the judgments means an ontological difference in Being, namely the difference between *noumenon* and *phenomenon*. The passage from knowledge to Being is obvious if we reword that the world involves nothing more than the *phenomenon* which is not a thing in itself but in the subject. The human intellect, particularly because it knows that the experience objects are mere phenomena, must admit the existence of the thing in itself, *i.e. noumenon*¹¹. Thus, the objects cannot be known as things in themselves, but they can be thought *as if they were*. If contrariwise, it could be stated *ad absurdum* that phenomena (appearances) exist without something being in existence. The human intellect, by the mere fact to refer to the phenomena, does presuppose at the same time and admit the thing in itself. The ontological proof for taking into consideration the object in two distinct ways, namely as phenomenon in a case, and as *noumenon* in another, belongs to the perfection of metaphysics as universal science that can be told about: „*nil actum repuians, si quid superesset agendum*”¹².

Consequently, two other ontological correlated discourses will arise: on the one hand, ontology of the phenomenon *i.e.* ontology in the subject; and, on the other hand ontology of an almost absolute exteriority. These ontologies are continued with some complementary pairs as: *nature — thing in itself, transcendental — transcendent, intellectus ectypus — intellectus archetypes, ens rationis — ens realissimum*.

In order to elaborate the primary ontological knowledge, Immanuel Kant started his enterprise with the long experience of the scientist, knowing that the fundamental arising problems which can be solved or annulled, will be classified in two large groups:

A. problems concerning the cognition about the nature of objects; and

B. problems concerning the cognition of what is scientific in all knowledge *in genere*¹³.

A class involves the metaphysical problems considered as a framework sketch for the study of nature, and they are the topics for the sciences and the

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *ibid.*, *I Transc. Doctr. Of Elem., Second Part, First Divis., Book I, Ch. II, Sect. II*, § 19, p. 53; and § 22, p. 57.

¹¹ There is a problem to discuss if it is about *noumenon* or *noumena*, *i.e. ein Ding an sich* or *zahlreiche Dinge an sich*; cf. Rudolf Eisler, *Kant Lexikon*, New York, Zurich, Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag, 1984, *Ding an sich*, pp. 93-97.

¹² „*He considered nothing done, so long as anything remained to be done*”, v. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason, ibid., Preface to the Second Edition*, p. 9.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *ibid.*, *The Architectonics of Pure Reason*, p. 243.

associated philosophies of sciences. **B** class stresses the philosophical feature and seems to move more and more away from the object so far as to break any connection with **A** class. The common supposition of the two great types of problems, unified under the accepted syntagm as „the classical epistemology”, is that there is a perfect normal form of Being and knowledge, and that it could be described. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* is rigorous proof about the way *how* knowledge confers the ontological background both to the object and the subject. At the end, Immanuel Kant added to the two ontological knowledge levels, **A** and **B**, a third one, **C**, called by him *propaedeutics* or *preliminary exercise*, studying the faculty of reason under the connection with any *a priori* pure knowledge¹⁴. According to these three ontological levels, being conditions are stated adequately: a) the possibility conditions defining the possible being (a being is possible if and only if it can be thought); b) the reality conditions defining the real being (a being is real if and only if it can be thought non-contradictorily); c) the existence conditions defining an existing being (a being exists if and only if it is perceived). There remains yet a question ingratiating more and more, as far as the problems of the primary ontology are exhausted, namely, *how* it happens that the object is going ever and ever to give itself up in order to be perceived, or, *how* it happens that the subject is able to compel the thing in itself to let itself for being perceived. The famous Kantian answer is „als-ob”, and inaugurates an ontological discourse of a second type about the possibility reality and necessity conditions of the thing in itself, that presumes an order in itself and an archetypical intellect for which the nature order and the generic intellect are nothing else than *ectypa i.e.* mere copies.

Immanuel Kant never believed that the Pure Reason is able to dive into the transcendent, but he considered that if there are two pictures of the world, one immanent to the subject and the other transcendent, then something must be done with them in order to unify them, because if there are two distinct ones, then there is an infinity¹⁵. The Kantian unification is the result of the fact that logos becomes Pure Reason, stated and exteriorized with the help of the scholastic doctrine of *suppositio terminorum*: „Here a distinction presents itself in regard to the way in which we may cogitate a presupposition — a distinction which is somewhat subtle, but of a great importance in transcendental philosophy. I may have sufficient grounds to admit something, or the existence of something in a relative point of view (*suppositio relativa*), without being justified in admitting it in an absolute sense (*suppositio absoluta*). This distinction is undoubtedly requisite, in the case of a regulative principle, the necessity of which we recognize, though we are ignorant of the source and cause of that necessity, and which we assume to be based upon some ultimate ground, for the purpose of being able to cogitate the universality of the principle in a more determinate way. For example, I cogitate the existence of a being corresponding to a pure transcendental idea”¹⁶.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 246.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, Introduction, I. On the Difference between Pure and Empirical Knowledge, p. 14.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, Appendix. Of the Ultimate End of the Natural Dialectic of Human Reason, p. 202; Germ. ed., Abschnitt. Kritik aller spekualiven Theologie, pp. 630-631.