Another Scandal of Philosophy*

Introduction

Kant in a footnote in the *Critique of Pure Reason* famously called it a 'scandal to philosophy'

that philosophy remained at a loss to refute the epistemic sceptic about the external world (Ak.

3:23 n.). This phrasing is met with Heidegger's rejoinder that the scandal is not so much that

philosophy falls short of proving the existence of the external world as that such proofs are time

and again expected and attempted (Heidegger 1993 205). In this paper it is argued that an

obvious reaction to this rejoinder would be inadequate, both in terms of its understanding of

Heidegger's point and of the vulnerability of Kant's system to it.

1. Kant's transcendental discourse

Against Heidegger's point one might argue that in Kant's discourse (concerning the problem of

the possibility of synthetic *a priori* judgments) the 'transcendental distinction' (between

phaenomena and *noumena*), which, incidentally, is also a critical distinction to avert the scandal

of the contradictions speculative reason would inevitably encounter without it (Ak 3:21) is used

adverbially, as pertaining to two ways of considering empirical objects: either as they appear [to

us] … or as they are in themselves" (rather than adjectivally, as pertaining to "two ontologically

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distinct sets of entities") (Allison 2006 112). Taken thus, the distinction is epistemological with transcendental idealism warranting the objective reality of the empirical objects to which synthetic *a priori* judgments *qua* epistemological are applied and does not entail a metaphysical position concerning the external world, the existence of which should be considered as problematic, let alone proved. Kant, moreover, only signalled this scandal in the *Critique*'s second edition to appease Garve's conflation of transcendental with Berkeleian idealism (Rockmore 2007 136). In terms of such a reaction, Heidegger's rejoinder seems relatively innocuous because it is illegitimately bound up with an unobvious reading of the transcendental distinction.

Heidegger's point, however, if it is applied to Kant's system challenges the epistemological enterprise as such for its metaphysical import (and thus renders the above reaction irrelevant) by proposing a conception of being of its own, namely 'being-in-the world' (*Dasein*). Heidegger contends that rather than it is to be proved "that and how" the external world exists it is to be elucidated why "being as being in the world tends to bury the external world 'epistemologically' in vanities only to resurrect it subsequently" (Heidegger 1993 206). The thrust of Heidegger's point, therefore, is that it denies the proponent of a transcendental discourse about the world the competence of analysing *Dasein* in a relevant way (fundamental-ontologically), accounting for its 'existential' aspects (e.g. anxiety, death, temporality).

The vulnerability of Kant's system to Heidegger's point is due to this system's architecture, in which the metaphysics of morals is claimed to contain the principles of morality being the only

conformity with a law of actions which can fully *a priori* be deduced from those principles, and thus has no anthropological foundation (Ak. 3: 544). This claim presupposes that an intelligible transition can be construed from the (rational) metaethic principles of the metaphysics of morals which are topically equivalent to the principles of the metaphysics of nature to its (deontological) normative content (for this distinction, e.g. Forschler 2013). This is questionable however, because differently from the metaphysics of nature, the normativity of the moral law, i.e its objective reality, cannot be deduced from its principles but is inferred from a metaethical assumption, the postulate of freedom. Accordingly, an abyss [*Kluft*] between the domains of the concepts about nature [*Naturbegriff*] and about freedom [*Freiheitsbegriff*] as the domains of the sensible and the supersensible (Ak 5:175) "separates every descriptive sentence [*phrase*], including the critical metalanguage of the deduction, from the prescriptive sentence [such that w]hen the latter is taken as referent of the former it must slip away". Due to the heterogeneity of the cognitive and the ethical sentence Kant´s system, therefore, manifests an ´absence of a homogeneous language´ (Lyotard 1983 174ff; 180).

2. Cosmopolitical metaphysics

Kant's worry with the intelligibility of the transition from metaethics to deontology might be assumed from his effort to cope in *Gemeinspruch* with another scandal of philosophy as which he labels the scepticism about this transition from theoretical rightness to practical validity in his discussion of Garve's (again) objections (Ak. 7:277 ff). The mild ironic undertone of this text

combined with its popular style (a common feature of his historico-political texts after 1781), compared with the severity of the critical style of his canonical *oeuvre* indicates, to follow Vorländer's suggestion (cp. Mom 2006 64ff), that Kant is here aiming at persuasion rather than exposition. Kant self-consciously expresses his concern with this stylistic diversity as he confesses that the *Critique* "never can become popular" and this not to his disliking. For, as Kant submits, the people [Volk] prefer to entertain practical truths instead of the fine-grained arguments of speculative reason and do not possess the capacity to critically appreciate the arguments and to invent the subtle objections in this field (Ak 3:21). The same with the *Metaphysics of Morals* (Ak 6:206). Compare in this respect (to anticipate what will be said in the next section) the exposition of the moral classification of suicide at (Ak 6:422ff) with, say, Camus' literary-styled philosophical reflections on a myth-historical topic in *Le mythe de Sisyphe.* By contrast, Kant is confident that his *Anthropologie* is due to the examples it offers "both systematically designed and yet popular" (Ak 7:121). And he professes explicitly his persuasive intent in the *Prolegomena* (Ak 4:255).

In view of this contrast it is not unproblematic to consider Kant's *oeuvre* as a consistent complex of ideas, tendencies, methods, themes, styles etc., let alone as manifesting a linear development. The contrast rather seems to indicate that in Kant's personal trajectory of reflection and belief-forming there is an 'undercurrent' of contrasting philosophical, aesthetic, political, and religious motives which 'express' themselves in a more or less salient diversity in styles of writing.

In (Mom 2006) the ironic tropes in *Zum ewigen Frieden* are interpreted as expressions of the embarrassment of the philosopher who seeks to reconcile his cosmopolitical philosophical outlook, i.e. a comprehensive account of the world (Toulmin 1990 128; 2001 133) and the course of world-history with a narrative about the contingency of the disasters of war. As the stylistic disparity of account and narrative suggests, this reconciliation remains a problem for Kant. Indeed, the critique of political reason has not been written (Lyotard 1983 189). By extension, taking Kant's embarrassment as a hermeneutic clue, one could say, in a perhaps more charitable reading than Toulmin's (cf. Toulmin 2001 24), that Kant attempts to balance the rationality of the ethico-juridical and teleological metalanguage of the philosopher with the reasonableness of the normative object language of the political commentator. That Kant undertakes this attempt shows that he is open to the vicissitudes of a toilsome existence; that it is bound to fail, though, is due to the 'absence of a homogeneous language'.

The diversity of styles in Kant's work as a whole bears witness to this. It indicates that the problems Kant sees himself as facing are not necessarily fundamental philosophical problems but reflect "a fundamental situation which has become a problem *for* [his] philosophy" (Seligman 1975 9): Kant not only is the epitome of modernity but also a child of his time. The historicity of philosophy involves that its history is a succession of transformations of metaphysical vocabularies which are introduced and revised for their purported aptness to express cosmopolitical ideas—e.g. humanity, world peace, environment—and accomodate their inherent antinomies. To come to terms with problems thus conceived we may refer philosophy to its

European tradition and retrace them back to the point at which a metaphysical vocabulary was first introduced. Thus, the "Copernican revolution" accomplished by Anaximander, i.e. the rephrasing of the problem of the world-order "from the myth-historical to the theoretical level" (Seligman 1957 117, 154) learns that the key metaphysical ideas were cast in a poetic language. Our task then is to investigate why and how these "moral and juridical terms [viz. δίκη, τίσις, αδικία, διδόναι δίκην] are mixed in a picture of nature" (Heidegger 1946 36; cf. Nietzsche 1872 §4). To this effect we can observe (i), that these terms express the 'personal aspect', i.e. "the interweaving of anthropogony and cosmogony" thus, that the latter, "however naturalistically formulated is anthropocentrically conceived"; (ii) that the key ideas which are expressed with these terms are separated from the 'natural area' (Seligman 1957 84; 157) and do not belong to the vocabulary of the specialist disciplines (Heidegger 1946 327). Anaximander's metaphysics owes its revolutionary dimension to the fact that these ideas, differently from Thales, are not expressed in a ´physical language´ (cf. Nietzsche 1872 §4).

3. Concluding remarks

This paper has shown that if Kant was "very much 'in the world'" (Zweig 2001 258f) this is apparent from the diversity of Kant's stylistic repertoire rather than from the transition from his transcendental to his moral discourse. Analogously, Anaximander's achievement indicates that if the quest for the unconditioned is to preserve its anthropological import and explicate cosmopolitical ideas it is to poetry rather than science that it could revert for its vocabulary.

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