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Kant – The Modern! (30 Philosophical Conjectures)

Fragment of a letter sent by email to Constantin Aslam, moderator of *"Springs of philosophy"* on Radio Romania Cultural, 21 January 2009

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Nota Bene: These 30 philosophical conjectures are actually the main ideas of my book: *Critical Introduction. About the possibility of Metaphysics as Science in the critical philosophy of Kant* (*Introducere critică. Despre posibilitatea metafizicii ca știință în perspectiva filosofiei critice kantiene*, Crates, 2004). The central thesis is that modern sciences brought Kant the ultimate confirmation, not refutation. I submitted this text as a paper proposal to the *12th International Kant Congress "Nature and Freedom"* (Vienna 2015), but I received no response.

1. No matter how it will be (monadic, pentadic or dodecahedric) our systems of categoryes are nothing more than just some systems of coordinates – some transformation matrices – some codes of interpretation that translate data of our sensitive experience into the terms of our faculty of representation.
2. Modern physics works with a hidden reality (as »thing in itself«, in Kant's philosophy), not explicit (as in Newtonian mechanics). The epistemological paradigm of modern sciences is that of Kant's transcendental aesthetics.
3. Kant's transcendental aesthetics is actually a *hermeneutics of* empirical experience. »Sensibility« is our faculty to recognize the »*a priori forms*« of our productive imagination into the data received from our sense organs.
4. Modern physics does not make the inventory of nature (does not draw maps that tend to substitute reality, as Fritjof Capra noticed in "The Tao of Physics"), but it knows from the beginning that it can approach its objects of study only in a probabilistic and relativistic manner. Modern physics is no more an exact science in the classical sense of the term, because it is *mathematicaly certain* only on its *uncertainties*. Modern physics is rather a hermeneutics of empirical experience than an objective description of reality. That said their way, Heisenberg, with his famous *uncertainty principle*, and Einstein, with his famous epistemological

paradox: "As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality"[1] . Indeed, as also said Niels Bohr, "It is wrong to think that the task of physics is to find out about nature. Physics concerns what we can say about nature"[2]. Regarding that insurmountable precipice between our mathematical models and physical reality, Bohr and Einstein were in agreement.

5. For Kant, modern science began with Galileo – with his way of forcing nature to answer certain questions in the course of experiments. Hence, from Galileo onwards, the new ontological and epistemological problem of philosophy is no longer our *sensitivity*, but the *consistency* of our criteria of truth in the interpretation of responses given by nature. (In the eyes of Galileo, Saturn seemed to have two satellites. *O*bservation was correct, something gravitate around Saturn, but the *interpretation* was still wrong.) "The book of nature is written in the language of mathematics", said Galileo, in *Il* Saggiatore (1683) – but any act of reading is an act of interpretation, and any act of interpretation is an act of treason, will try to say Kant, in his own way. Nothing is as it seems at first glance. »*Tradutore,* traditore*!*« – it was the great scholastic adage of the Middle Ages.
6. *Transcendental illusion* is the *veil of Maya*. The awareness on this confusion (*amphiboly*, or *subreption*, as Kant says), that we do always between *object* and *concept*, between *sign* and *meaning* or between *phenomenon* and *thing in itself*, it is *the donkeys bridge (pons asinorum)* of philosophy – as it was considered the Pythagorean theorem by scholars. Indeed, scientific experiment is not an innocent and heavenly act of contemplation, but a genuine interrogation – our brutal way to force nature to come into our *synthetic a priori concepts* as in the *slipper of Cinderella*. In modern physics the act of measurement is not a simple act of observation of nature, but a rude interference into her personal life. In modern physics the so-called *laws of nature* no longer regard nature, but our relationship with it. Scientific theories are no longer some simple police reports but some indictments. *Science is our way of contaminating nature with our own heuristic fictions. Technology is our way to plagiarize Nature* (or God, if you wish).
7. Advancement of knowledge *depends not so much on increasing the resolution of our telescopes and microscopes* as of the finesse our *conceptual grid of interpretation*. *Indeed, without sensuous intuitions our concepts are void, but without concepts our sensuous intuitions are blind*, says Kant (KrV, A 51, B 75). *Without a priori principles, our empirical knowledge would be a simple groping (ein blosses Herumtappen*) – a bunch of experimental data for which any generalization would not be feasible. *Therefore, after a courageous investigation of our criteria of truth, Kant also had to proceed to a severe examination of our moral criteria. For without moral in Kant's view, man is nothing but a »crooked wood« (krummen Holz). Morality is our only original contribution in the economy of nature – is the attitude that brings us irreversibly out of animal kingdom. Morality in Kant, is another instinct – a kind of survival instinct turned inside out, which does not concern our selfish interests (personal or of group), but our*

[1] A. Einstein, *Sidelights on Relativity*, London, 1922, p. 28 – apud M. Friedman, *Kant and the Exact Sciences*, p. 56.

[2] Apud Nick Herbert, in *Quantum Reality*, Anchor Press/Doubleday, New York, 1985, p. 259.

universal interests. We are truly free only in our moral acts – he means Kant. The moral is the historical determined expression of causality through freedom. Only in his moral acts man proves his divine ancestry. Man is not truly free when does what he thinks he's free to do, but only when he chooses to do only what reason tells him that anyone can do without damage the freedom of others. Do not confuse, however, »free will« with »causality through freedom«. To be free is not to choose a path between some predefined paths, but to be a pioneer (an opener of new paths). Only by moral man become really a determinant factor in history – the original (demiurgical) beginning of a new causal chain in nature. This is the great ontological stake of the famous classical urge: sapere aude!

8. All older theories can be found, in one way or another, in the latest theories. Novelty or progress of a scientific theory should not necessarily lead to cassation of the earlier (in the spirit of Occam), but, in the overcoming that it represents (in the spirit of Dilthey, Windelband or Kuhn), the new theories must re-signify the old ones – they have to reveal their limits (their domain of validity) and wear them to a broader knowledge – in short, must find their place in the landscape of scientific knowledge. All philosophies are true – not false or meaningless, as analysts say. Newer philosophies are superior to the older only if they manage to make them more intelligible, i.e. to reconstruct them in some wider and more consistent contexts of ideas.
9. Fundamental interest of philosophy is the discovery of the truth, not its public approval. For Kant, criticism is a form of respect, not of ideological struggle. The precedent most notorious of this idea is right in the majestic introduction of Kant in his onset book[3] (1746), where he said that in our relationship with tradition only our chastening (*tadeln*) attitude represents our true sign of respect for it. (On that time, the word «Kritik» has not yet entered in Kants philosophical vocabulary.)
10. Kant is interested in *ontology of knowledge*, not in psychology and sociology of knowledge. Metaphysics, in its historical development, is nothing more than the original Matrix and, at the same time, the Cardinal – the upper limit of scientific knowledge. Metaphysics is the Queen – it always makes the step forward – science does nothing but coming on its footsteps and usurp its privileges, relying on some empirical evidence, but saying essentially the same thing. Has never been more obvious that rapt of science on the metaphysics as today, when modern cosmology does nothing more than reiterate, in other words, the old creationist myths. *When the object of physics is no longer testable (as is the universe as a whole), physics becomes inevitably a metaphysics.*
11. Philosophies in their historical sequence, as far as they represent a progress of philosophical knowledge, they are nothing but some Prolegomena or Propaedeutics to the previous philosophies (some introductions to other introductions). Kant is an introduction to Plato. Hegel is an introduction to Heraclitus etc.
12. The great tradition of philosophical thinking is a kind of alpine ascension on a immutable itinerary of questions that anyone can enter and perform at any time in history, without relying on the help of an initiate (like Menon's slave depended

[3] "Gedanken von der wahren Schätzung..." A VI.

on Socrates' questions) or on the assimilation of tradition, as professed the Scholastics.

13. Kant's transcendental idealism as architectural vision on thought is a *system of reconciling our fundamental perspectives of knowledge*.
14. In his critical solution to the problem of cosmological antinomies Kant inaugurated the new epistemological paradigm of modern science – the dualistic and relativistic vision on a reality forever hidden, which creates itself even in the act of knowing. With this, Kant connected Western analytical thinking not only to the old platonic tradition, but by default, to the great Eastern philosophical tradition.
15. Non-Euclidean geometries, theorems of Gödel, epistemological view of the Copenhagen School, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and Einstein's relativistic physics brought Kant the ultimate confirmation.
16. In the concept of »*thing* in itself« Kant has the intuition of a generic »*obstacle*« (*Gegenstand*), a generic »*ontological surprise*«, i.e. an ontological precariousness of our instruments of knowledge. But Kant did not accuse God of this »*ontological disability*«, as did Descartes. Guilty, in Kant's view, is our own »*analytical thinking*«, our *inability* to get out from the tutelage of our *sensitive* insights and the *fear* to think with our own head.
17. The so-called *empirical knowledge of nature* is actually a deconstruction of our transcendental certainties, i.e. a recurrent (retrospective) knowledge of a mysterious external presence. In other words, experience occasions knowing rather what we do not know than what we know with certainty.
18. Fundamental epistemological problem of Kant is not the *revelation of truth*, but the *recognition* of truth – *erkennen*, not *kennen* – *how can we* realize that something is true or false.
19. Kant's *critical method*, which Kant had also called »*Socratic method*« (KrV, B XXXI), theologian's *apophatic method*, Husserl's *method of phenomenological reduction* and *sofianic method* of Lucian Blaga, are essentially expressions of one and the same epistemological paradigm.
20. Kant's man is the *Cheselden's blind* – the patient who felt cheated when he saw the light for the first time (at age 13), and he did not know what tricks him: senses, or the sight. This illustrious pathological case was for Kant a real »*experimentum crucis*« (as were for modern physics the experiences of Kirchhoff and Planck or Michelson and Morley).
21. Kant's *analytic-synthetic distinction* revealed the existence of two fundamental *perspectives of thought*: the *mole's perspective* and the *bird's perspective*, as I like to say – *the realistic, empiricist or naturalistic perspective* (based on the *consistency criterion*), and *the perspective of transcendental idealism* (based on the *completeness criterion*). Kant's great contribution is that *he managed to reconcile these two perspectives of thought*, i.e. *take them out of their traditional antagonism and put them in a complementary relationship*. Kant's entire philosophical view is biased by a *juridical paradigm* – everything to Kant, is *a process which aims at establishing a lasting (eternal) peace between these two enemy camps*.
22. Epistemological paradigm of quantum mechanics (summarized in the well-known witticism: »*Contraria non contradictoria sed complementa sunt*«) is nothing

more than a reiteration of *Kant's critical solution to antinomy of pure reason*. Recognizing that ignorance of reason regarding the »transcendent«, and the withdrawal of its competencies on the territory of the »transcendental« are the epistemological matrix of probabilistic interpretation in quantum mechanics.

23. The dilemma of Kantian system of metaphysics (revealed by Jacobi) is similar to the Gödel's dilemma, concerning the consistency and completeness of logical and mathematical systems. Difference is that if the positive sciences opting for the theoretical consistency of their mainframe systems (fundamental feature of the dogmatic rationalism, Kant would say), philosophy generally opt for the completeness of its system of ideas – hence the paradoxism of philosophy.
24. »*Thing in itself*« (as *Gegenstand*), Gödel could say, is a sentence that says of itself that it is indemonstrable. »*Thing in itself*« is a sentence that can be asserted in the system, but cannot be deduced from the axioms of the system – it can be inserted or removed from the system of metaphysics only in the axiomatic manner – just as the vanishing point (the meeting place of parallels, in the laws of perspective) is excluded from Euclidean geometry and included in non-Euclidean geometries.
25. *"In der Erklärung der Erscheinungen der Natur muss uns indessen vieles ungewiss und manche Frage unauflöslich bleiben, weil das, was wir von der Natur wissen, zu dem, was wir erklären sollen, bei weitem nicht in allen Fällen zureichend ist. Es fragt sich nun: ob in der Transzendentalphilosophie irgend eine Frage, die ein der Vernunft vorgelegtes Objekt betrifft, durch eben diese reine Vernunft unbeantwortlich sei, und ob man sich ihrer entscheidenden Beantwortung dadurch mit Recht entziehen könne, dass man es als schlechthin ungewiss (aus allem dem, was wir erkennen können) demjenigen beizählt, wovon wir zwar so viel Begriff haben, um eine Frage aufzuwerfen, es uns aber gänzlich an Mitteln oder am Vermögen fehlt, sie jemals zu beantworten."* (KrV, A 477, B 505) In this phrase Kant has done nothing but formulate the *incompleteness principle of metaphysics*.
26. Jacobi's remark such that "Without the condition of things in themselves you cannot get into the Kantian system, with it you cannot stay in it" is nothing but an early formulation of the famous undecidability theorem of Gödel, which could be formulated as: without »*thing in itself*« metaphysical system is incomplete, but with the »*thing in itself*« it is (seems to be) inconsistent. Kant has revealed for the first time that in a logical system *completeness* and *consistency* are *two orthogonal dimensions*. In fact, the system of metaphysics is a paraconsistent logic (in the terms of da Costa) or a super compact logic, such as ZFC-extended (in the terms of Peter Koellner, Harvard University). »*Thing* in itself« is a strange character who, like Epimenides (the Cretan) says:" All Cretans are liars," or, as Gödel, writes on the blackboard the sentence" *This sentence is indemonstrable*" and then asks if it is demonstrable or not. To be complete, metaphysics must postulate the »*transcendent*« (the »*thing* in itself«, the »world« and the »God«), but to remain consistent, it must evict the subject of such *synthetic a priori concepts* from its ontological remit. That's what made Kant. Metaphysics must be able to ask questions that they cannot answer – just to be able to determine its own limits. You can build a wall on the edge of a cliff, but how to put a foundation stone at the edge of the world? The transcendent is a kind of cantilever scaffold which reason builds over the Nothingness, just to be able to rise above *mundus*

intelligibilis, into a complete (global) vision. The Transcendent is the way of reason to objectivate for itself the Nothingness.

27. Fundamental dilemma of Kant's transcendental philosophy, namely, if the »*thing in itself*« is something or nothing, is congruent with the dilemma of modern physicists, mathematicians and logicians: *if infinite physically exist, if the primordial vacuum is still something, or if the cardinal of a set is or is not an element of the set*.
28. Positive sciences, as they approach the »*great* unification« (a global vision of Nature), they do nothing but to approach the Metaphysics, its dialectical, paradoxical, ubiquitous and indiscernible vision. Science of Metaphysics, just as Kant imagined, do not aspire to a different kind of knowledge of nature, but to the *a priori model of any possible knowledge*. Object of sciences is always *outside* of them. The object of Metaphysics is always *within*. Metaphysics, in Kant's view, is the *science of its own possibility*. Last chance of Metaphysics, in Kant's view, was to become a *transcendental logic*. *Transcendental logic* is not an emasculated logic, deprived of its ontological prerogatives (as Heidegger would notice), but a metaphysic well temperate by its own skepticism – by its own »*System der Vorsicht*« (KrV, A 711, B 739), as Kant says. *Transcendental logic is the logic of the other side, the logic of those who have crossed the donkey bridge of philosophy. Transcendental logic* is the logic of the *right hemisphere* (of the brain), and Aristotle's logic is the logic of the *left hemisphere*, we might say, in Iain McGilchrist's terms.
29. The relationship between the Kantian transcendental idealism and the empiricist realism of the Aristotelian tradition is reproduced both in the relationship between Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometries, as well as in the relationship between relativistic and Newtonian physics.
30. Modern foundational researches did no more than reiterate the dilemmas and conclusions of Kant in his research on the foundations of metaphysics. After a half-century since the appearance of *Critique of Pure Reason*, a Copernican revolution took place in geometry: Lobachevski, Gauss and Bolyai brought the infinity (the transcendent) in geometry. After another half-century the leaders of quantum mechanics and of relativity have done the same thing in physics. A few decades ago, began a Copernican revolution in formal logic. But many other sciences are working further under the empire of *transcendental illusion* – they are still to *puberty (unmündigkeit)* – have not yet reached the big self-referential questions (regarding their own consistency) and still believe, as *Cheselden's blind* before he opened his eyes, that *senses* do not lie.

Addendum

(19.09.2018, Tübingen)[4]:

In the realm of the *physiology of vision*, a *Copernican revolution* also took place, at the crossroads of the 19th and 20th centuries. *Gestalists* are those who, obviously inspired by Kant, have tried a new approach of the *physiology of vision*. Their epistemological key was the *apriorism* of Kant's *transcendental aesthetics*. Their main postulates were: 1) the brain is not a *tabula rasa*, i.e. a simple receiver of the outside world, but it has its own *creative contributions* in the *construction of empirical reality*, and 2) the things we perceive through the senses are unquestionably real, but *the way we perceive them (the way they are for us)* is a subjective one, which depends not only on the *nature of things*, but also on the properties of our own *faculty of representation*.

The things themselves are not colored, we are the ones that color them. Colors are a code of our own mind by which we nominate and recognize things.

Such ideas are already a common place in the world of neuroscientists.

"Colors, tones, smells, and tastes are mental creations constructed by the brain out of sensory experience. They do not exist, as such, outside the brain. (…)

Although our perceptions of the size, shape, and color of objects are derived entirely from patterns of light that strike our retinas, our perceptions nevertheless appear to correspond to the physical properties of objects. In most instances we can use our perceptions to manipulate an object and to predict aspects of its behavior. Perception, we can show, organizes an object's essential properties well enough to let us handle the object appropriately.

In short, our perceptions are not direct records of the world around us. Rather, they are constructed internally according to constraints imposed by the architecture of the nervous system and its functional abilities. The philosopher Immanuel Kant referred to these inherent brain properties as *a priori* knowledge. In Kant's view the mind was not the passive receiver of sense impressions envisaged by empiricists. Rather the human mind was built to conform with certain pre-existing conditions, such as space, time, and causality. The existence of these ideals was *independent* of any physical stimuli coming from beyond the body. So knowledge, according to Kant, was based not simply on sensory experience but on the brain's properties that organize sensory experience."[5]

Indeed, here is what Kant says very clearly:

"*Der Wohlgeschmack eines Weines gehört nicht zu den objektiven Bestimmungen des Weines, mithin eines Objekts so gar als Erscheinung betrachtet, sondern zu der besondern Beschaffenheit des Sinnes an dem Subjekte, was ihn geniesst. Die Farben sind nicht Beschaffenheiten der Körper, deren Anschauung sie anhängen, sondern auch nur Modifikationen des Sinnes des Gesichts, welches vom Lichte auf gewisse Weise affiziert wird.*" (KrV, Anm. A 29)

However, I believe that the *Copernican revolution* in the *physiology of perception*

[4] This **Addendum** was attached to the email sent to Prof. Dr. Marius Ueffing (04/03/2019) and Prof. Dr. Eberhart Zrenner (26/06/2019). Unfortunately, I received no response. I am attaching it to this paper in the hope that it will eventually reach the right readers.

[5] Esther P. Gardner și John H. Martin în Capitolul 21, *Coding of Sensory Information*, în *Principles of Neural Science*, 4/e, editori Eric R. Kandel, James H. Schwartz și Thomas M. Jessell, McGraw-Hill, New York, 2000, p. 412.

is still at the beginning. What I intend to do is to take this *apriorical approach* to its last consequences.

In the last few years I have been looking for *physiological arguments* for Kant's *transcendental aesthetics*, and I have found a lot. Now I'm looking for *philosophical arguments* for a *cybernetic of perception*, and I already have a whole theory.

The project I'm working on is a *cybernetic interpretation of the physiology of vision*. The final point of arrival will have to be an explanation of *how we see what we see* and *what is actually the empirical reality*.

In principle, I believe that the problem of *image* in *physiology of vision* is epistemologically congruent with the problem of *thing in itself* in Kant's *transcendental aesthetics*.

The final question of the *physiology of vision* is *where and how the 3D image of the world that we perceive is formed*. Until now, despite all laboratory findings, no one has been able to answer this question.

I believe I have found, if not an answer, at least a new beginning in search of this answer.