

## THE ILLUSION OF AN ILLUSION NECESSARY OF THE REASON

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Kant characterized his reflection on the antinomies as the point from which he started to build his critical system. As is known, these prove the limits and the final natural contradiction “which human reason must necessarily encounter in its progress”<sup>1</sup>. Kant claims that he revealed this natural illusion and the reasons why it appears (within the frame of his system, in a fact. Because it is a consequence of his conception about human knowledge). But if we make a strictly logical analysis of the transcendental Idea of “World” in the very way it was defined by Kant. It seems to be only a logic error to define the notion of world in such way. The antinomies resulting only from that and, consequently, it is not necessary to introduce the conflict between intellect and reason in order to explain it.

According with Kant, world means “the mathematical sum–total of all phenomena **and** the totality of their synthesis, alike through composition and through division”(CPR, p. 356). From logical point of view this definition can be considered incorrect for three reasons.

First, it is a constructive definition of a concept of an infinite multiplicity and as such has thus having a contradictory character. For example, when I say the world is infinite or finite in space or in time, I detach myself from the attributes of space – which is infinite -, or of the

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synthesis – which is finite - and I try to attribute a measure to the world. But the world is the synthesis of phenomena, a synthesis successive in time as much as the latter's size allows, that is unlimited because time is infinite. Thus the contradictory character of the world is a concept, which results from the very definition because we are trying to give a constructive definition of a virtually infinite collection of objects.

Secondly, that the world is the synthesis of all phenomena in space or, more clearly, a synthesis in space, is a definition by accident because from the concept of world I can't infer this synthesis, which is being done. This situation appears because the feature of the synthesis, which is attributed to the world, has nothing to do with the aggregate of all phenomena, but only with the second part of the definition, attached arbitrarily by Kant to the concept of world. This because by definition the world is the aggregate of all phenomena and by no means a thing itself, and that they are phenomena already presupposes that synthesis carried out by the laws of the intellect.

This situation appears because, in a fact, the Kantian definition of the world is an *idem per idem* definition. *The manner in which he define the world leaves out the fact that the apprehensive synthesis necessary for the world to be turned into an acquired knowledge is already supposed to have been carried out for the phenomena which constitute the world, otherwise they couldn't be considered as phenomena. This means, the "world" is the phenomenon of all phenomena, therefore a notion defined incorrect from logical point of view.* From this we must conclude that the world, according to the given definition can't be anything else but the concept of a phenomenon (and not at all that of

an Idea!). Only that, in this case, the world is a little more special phenomenon because if it has to be obtained, at least apparently, in the same conditions as the concepts about phenomena, then it means that the Idea of world means in fact *the phenomenon of all phenomena*. And it is obvious that this is an *idem per idem* definition, that means it is not a definition. Thus, the accomplishment of what is, in effect, a synthesis of synthesis represents a totally unjustified demand, which Kant imposes on concept of the “world” so as to be accepted as knowledge.

In the same time, on the argumentation’s level the logical correctness, and thus the “natural” character of the illusion is made possible by a ambiguity which stands on the bases of the entire Critique. The commonplace *reductio ad absurdum* demonstration of the antinomies, is achievable because throughout the Critique he use the concept of the experience, in a fact the “possibility of the experience”, in an ambiguous manner.

The core of the Kantian revolution in knowledge consist in the inverting meaning of the experience. „It has hitherto been assumed that our cognition must conform to the objects; (...) Let us then make the experiment whether we may not be more successful in metaphysics, if we assume that the objects must conform to our cognition.” (CPR, p. 33) This totally new conception of the knowledge is based on the supreme principle of all synthetical judgements asserts: "Every object is subject to the necessary conditions of the synthetical unity of the manifold of intuition in a possible experience."(CPR, p. 184) It is the one who gives universality to our knowledge. And this principle is achieved in the way of reason which, in its logical use, endeavours to discover the general condition of

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its judgment (CPR, p. 280) But he distinguishes between reason and understanding considering that “the understanding may be a faculty for the production of unity of phenomena by virtue of rules; the reason is a faculty for the production of unity of rules (of the understanding) under principles” (CPR., 278) because „we defined the understanding to be the faculty of rules; reason may be distinguished from understanding as the faculty of principles” (CPR, p. 276) This means that this principle is an outcome of the activity of the reason. In consequence the reason only can guarantees the universality of this principle. It seems that the reason and understanding is more alike, and the reason is more useful than Kant want to accept.

But, Kant wants to be totally clear by making a plain distinction both between the understanding and reason concepts and between the understanding and reason principles through their possible employment. “Hence the objective employment of the pure conceptions of reason is always transcendent, while that of the pure conceptions of the understanding must, according to their nature, be always immanent, inasmuch as they are limited to possible experience.” (CPR, p. 276) In the same way, the reason’s principles will be transcendent in relation with phenomena and “therefore completely different from all principles of the understanding, the use made of which is entirely immanent, their object and purpose being merely the possibility of experience.” (CPR, p. 280)

I will let this issue of viability of the reason’s employment aside and take for grant the Kantian conception about the functions and the relation between reason and understanding. Even though, some logical problems of Kant argumentation still remain. How is

possible to prove equally accurate two contradictory theses? From logical point of view only if an incorrect reasoning is involve. In the case of antinomies this is made possible, in my view, not, or not only, because of the motive invoked by Kant, the extending of the reason beyond its boundaries; but, because he employs in the argumentation, an implicit distinction, which underlies the entire *Critique*.

I am talking about the distinction between the *possible experience* - which you could call the *real* possibility of the experience, the experience which could be actually in sensibility -, and the *possibility of experience* (in general) – that which we could call the transcendental (not transcendent) possibility of the experience. Kant itself seems to not make always this distinction although his reasoning implies often this distinction and is using differently these syntagms in his work.

For what reason this distinction is necessary for the accuracy of the Kant's conception? If we want to prove knowledge's possibility is not enough to show the way in which the concepts of the understanding are applying to the objects of the experience, but moreover why all the objects must comply with these rules, as objects of every possible experience. "If a cognition is to have objective reality, that is, to relate to an object, and possess sense and meaning in respect to it, it is necessary that the object be given in some way or another. Without this, our conceptions are empty, and we may indeed have thought by means of them, but by such thinking we have not, in fact, cognized anything, we have merely played with representation. To give an object, if this expression be understood in the sense of "to present" the object, not mediately but immediately in intuition, means nothing else than to apply the representation of it to

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experience, be that experience real or only possible.”(CPR, p. 183) And this possibility of the concept to apply is guarantee also by the understanding, precisely, by its principles (!). “That principles exist at all is to be ascribed solely to the pure understanding, which is not only the faculty of rules in regard to that which happens, but is even the source of principles according to which everything that can be presented to us as an object is necessarily subject to rules, because without such rules we never could attain to cognition of an object.” (CPR, p. 185). Thus, the understanding can apply its concepts on phenomena, as objects of possible experience, because it contains, in the same time, the principles of the possibility the experience. “While then, on the one hand, experience, as empirical synthesis, is the only possible mode of cognition which gives reality to all other synthesis; on the other hand, this latter synthesis, as cognition a priori, possesses truth, that is, accordance with its object, only in so far as it contains nothing more than what is necessary to the synthetical unity of experience. (...)

A priori synthetical judgements are possible when we apply the formal conditions of the a priori intuition, the synthesis of the imagination, and the necessary unity of that synthesis in a transcendental apperception, to a possible cognition of experience, and say: «The conditions of the possibility of experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience, and have, for that reason, objective validity in an a priori synthetical judgement»" (CPR, p. 184) This demand is justified by the fact that these concepts must have more than a logical signification “and to be something more than a mere analytical expression of the form of thought, and to

have a relation to things and their possibility, reality, or necessity, they must concern possible experience and its synthetical unity, in which alone objects of cognition can be given.” (CPR, p. 223)

That implies the possibility of reasoning on two levels. On the level of pure intuition and using principles of unity and pure concepts (like in mathematics), and on the level of empirical intuitions by applying the concepts on the material of sensibility. For this reason, the antinomic conflict emerges, for this double possibility of using the pure concepts of the intellect in pure intuition or in the empirical one. The first is thought like infinite, while the second is finite. And this possibility is mentioned expressly in the Critique. “There is thus a twofold exercise of reason. Both modes have the properties of universality and an a priori origin in common, but are, in their procedure, of widely different character. The reason of this is that in the world of phenomena, in which alone objects are presented to our minds, there are two main elements--the form of intuition (space and time), which can be cognized and determined completely a priori, and the matter or content--that which is presented in space and time, and which, consequently, contains a something--an existence corresponding to our powers of sensation.” (CPR, p. 528) So in the case of the *Dialectic*, the equal powerful demonstrations are made possible because they are made from two different denotations of the possibility of the experience (i.e. the possible experience and the possibility of experience.) The former implies the limited empirical intuition and the latter the boundless pure one. For this reason the argumentations are valid without being correct. For example, “granted that the world has no beginning in time” (accordingly with the

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pure infinite intuition), than „passed away an infinite series of successive conditions or states of things in the world”; but this is impossible from the perspective of empirical intuition (which solely requests to be completed by means of a *successive* synthesis) consequently, „a beginning of the world is a necessary condition of its existence”. Therefore the reasoning  $[(p \rightarrow q) \& \neg q] \rightarrow \neg p$  is valid.

This permanent substitute between the two perspective could be observed throughout the entire Chapter, some time in a very obvious way. Although in the beginning he said „appearances are here regarded as given; what reason demands is the absolute completeness of the conditions of their possibility, in so far as these conditions constitute a series”, when he passes to the demonstration of the antinomies he says: “This, however, is impossible. An infinite aggregate of actual things cannot therefore be viewed as a given whole, nor consequently as simultaneously given.”<sup>iii</sup> And than what we should understand by the first „as given”?) We could synthesize the dilemma of the Transcendental Dialectic in the following phrase: “The world thought as phenomenon is opposed to the world known as phenomenon.”

Such a logical error can be strange coming from a rigorous thinker like Kant. But it becomes clear if we consider a fact noticed by a few of Kant’s commentators, that, considered *ad litteram*, his theory of knowledge limits the true cognition to the perceptual knowledge.<sup>iii</sup> In the same time I consider there are elements enough in *Critique* to lead us on a positive solution, even within its frame, of the “mathematical-transcendental antinomies”; solution that could satisfy both the intellect and the reason, just as in the case of the dynamic-transcendental antinomies. And this

can be done not by transcendental artefacts as Kant does for the last two antinomies (using, for example the *meta-critical* concept of *Causality through Freedom*, to solve the third), but by the new paradigms of modern physics: the relativity theory's hyper-sphere for the world's magnitude in space, the no-boundary condition for the world's beginning in time and wave-particle complementarity for matter's divisibility. I consider, and I argue this somewhere else<sup>iv</sup>, that it is possible without losing a part of the essence of Kant's conception. Moreover, the very paradigm developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, contain insight and values elements which could be preserved even now, after the tremendous progress of the natural sciences.

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<sup>i</sup> I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B, translated into Romanian by N. Bagdasar and Elena Moisuc, Bucharest, Pub. IRI, 1994, p. 358. This work will be abbreviated in text as (CPR). For the quotations from *Critique of Pure Reason*.

I also used the e-text version of Norman Kemp Smith translation, site internet: <http://www.hkbu.edu.hk>

<sup>ii</sup> For a detailed analysis of the errors of argumentation in Kant's antinomies see: Anton Dumitriu, *The Metaphysical Value of Reason* Pub. *Grinta*, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, pp. 43-71

<sup>iii</sup> I had developed this idea in my PhD. dissertation: "*The Mathematical-transcendental Antinomies and its Destiny in the Contemporary Philosophy and Science*", (in press).

<sup>iv</sup> In the same work.