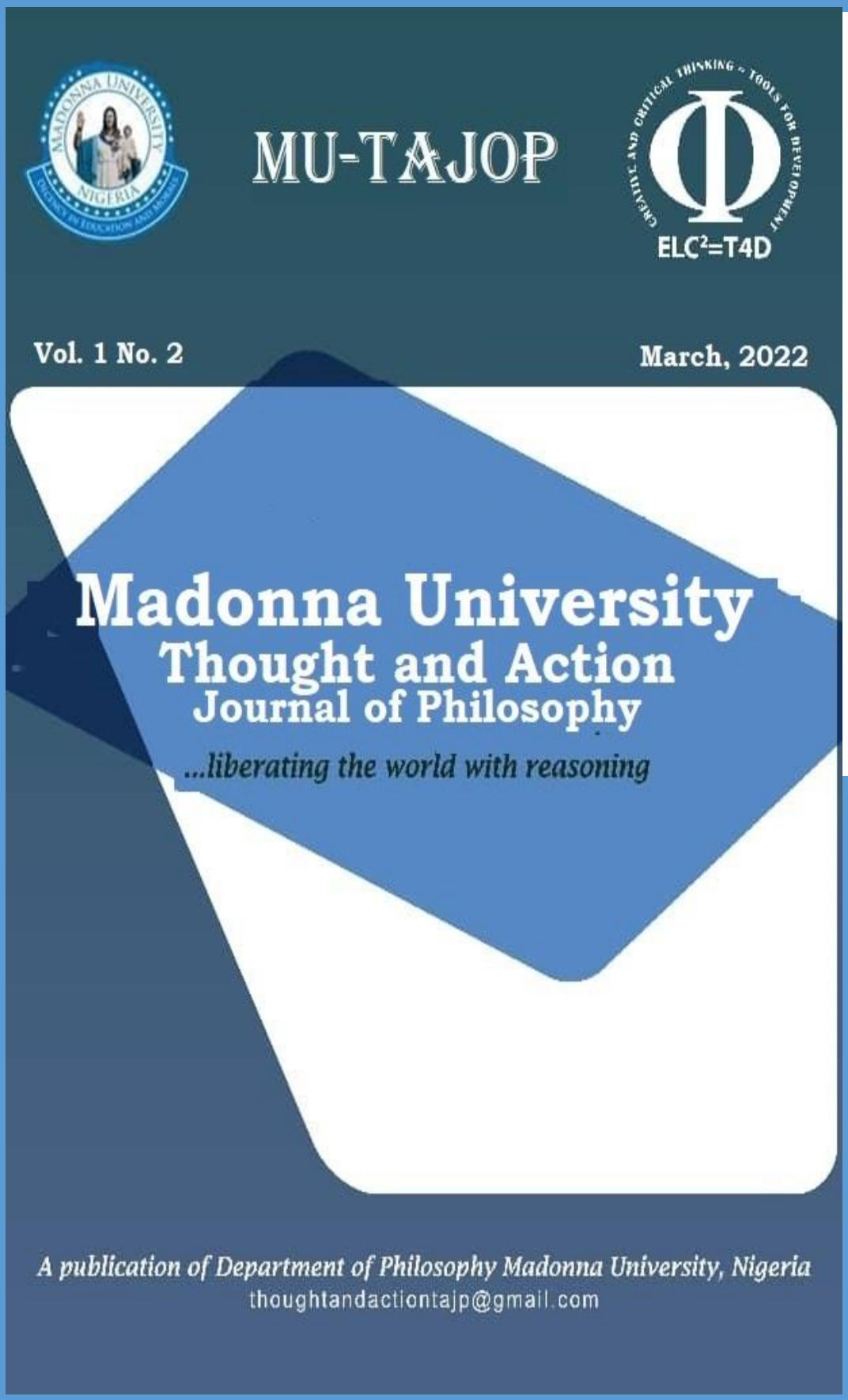

Kant, Metaphysics and the Problem of Affection

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Abstract
In his so-called Copernican revolution in philosophy, Immanuel Kant displaces activity from the object and locates the same in the subject in his attempt to account for knowledge. To be sure, Kant's "changed point of view" reverses the Western traditional metaphysical understanding of cognition, which constitutes knowledge in terms of the givenness of the object to the subject. Several schools of interpretation have arisen in an attempt to gain an understanding of this aspect of Kant's thought. This paper will dialogue with the analytic school of philosophy, which reads the Copernican revolution, and, indeed, the German idealism movement Kant has inaugurated as denying the existence of the external world and, by extension, metaphysics. It is the view of this inquiry that this reading misrepresents Kant's view on metaphysics. In opposition to analytic philosophy, therefore, it will argue that Kant has an ambivalent attitude toward metaphysics. In particular, it will contend that Kant's paradigm shift constitutes what might roughly be termed a rejection of "bad metaphysics," while accepting what he considers "good metaphysics." Kant rejects bad metaphysics for extending thought beyond sensibility and, consequently, allowing thought access to objects not given in experience. By contrast, good metaphysics restricts thought in what it can reasonably know; granting reason insight only into the condition of possible experience. Hence, Kant's rejection of a metaphysics type should not be confused with a wholesale rejection of metaphysics as such. Formulated in this way, therefore, Kant's anti-metaphysical credentials should be re-examined or at least qualified.

Key Words: Copernican turn, subjectivity, transcendental idealism, *a priori* knowledge, affection.

Introduction

This paper examines Kant's attitude towards metaphysics and the relational problem of affection, against the backdrop of the Copernican turn in philosophy. Kant's Copernican revolution inaugurates a "changed point of view" that removes activity from the object and locates the same in the subject in order to account for cognition. Unlike traditional metaphysics, which constitutes knowledge in terms of the givenness of object to the subject, Kant's paradigm shift allows the subject to contribute to the object of knowledge. Several conceptual paradigms have been

generated in an attempt to gain insight into this aspect of Kant's thought. This essay identifies and dialogues with one school of thought. The analytic insight reads Kant's Copernican turn as a denial of the existence of external space and, by extension, metaphysics. Concerned that idealism threatens its philosophical realism, analytic philosophy revolts against Kant and the German idealism tradition he inaugurated. This inquiry rejects this reading as a misrepresentation of Kant's view on metaphysics. Against this reading, therefore, this study aims to show that Kant is deeply committed to metaphysics, even as he rejects a metaphysics type. In particular, it argues that Kant rejects what might loosely be termed "bad metaphysics," while accepting the variant that he considers "good metaphysics." Seen as such, Kant's ambivalent attitude toward metaphysics should not be construed as a wholesome rejection of metaphysics. The paper is divided into four sections. The first section rehearses the Copernican turn, in this inquiry's view, Kant's monumental contribution to Western philosophy. The second section surveys analytic philosophy's interpretation of Kant's Copernican turn. The third section will outline Kant's thought on metaphysics. The fourth section concludes this inquiry by looking at issue of affection in Kant's thought.

The Copernican Turn in Philosophy

In the second preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant (1965) announces his so-called Copernican turn in philosophy. He writes:

> Hitherto, it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge by establishing something in regard to them a priori, by means of concepts, have on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the task of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge. This would agree better with what is desired, namely, that it should be possible to have knowledge of objects a priori, determining something in regard to them prior to their being given. (CPR, B xvi)

A core aspect of the Copernican turn is that the subject must contribute to the object of cognition. Suffice it to say that Kant does not call his intellectual revolution the Copernican; rather, it is a designation used by his interpreters to refer to his paradigm shift in philosophy, which he claims proceeds along the "lines of Copernicus' hypothesis," even as his position may or may not be similar to Copernicus' (Blumenberg, 1987, p. 607). Nicolaus Copernicus (1453 -1543) proposes a new celestial mechanics by substituting a geocentric approach for a heliocentric one that would be developed by Galileo, Kepler, and Newton. Similarly, Kant proposes an alternative way of looking at our cognitive relationship with nature. On his view, the mind is active vis-à-vis nature and, therefore, not a passive recipient of sensation from nature.

In Kant's view, philosophy was long overdue for an intellectual revolution. As far as he was concerned, philosophical theories prior to his own lacked systematicity, as he understood it. In his estimation systematicity was necessary for defeating skepticism and attainment of *a priori* knowledge. For Kant, the successes of the new sciences and mathematics, on the one hand, and the inability of philosophy to successfully engage issues of God, immortality of the soul, and freedom underscored the need for a revolution. Mathematics achieved systematicity much earlier with Thales, whose "demonstration with the isosceles triangle" established the discipline as a rigorous enterprise. The "natural sciences" achieved this, according to Blumenberg (1987), only at the "beginning of the modern age" (p. 596). In philosophy generally, logic achieved the status

of a rigorous science through Aristotle (p. 599). In relation to metaphysics, the search for systematicity continues into the modern philosophical period where Descartes recasts the discourse in terms of epistemology, even as he does not abandon metaphysics (Rockmore, 2000, p. xiv). Regardless of whether Descartes successfully transforms metaphysics into epistemology or not, his new method of doing philosophy influences his successors. Descartes sweeps away previous philosophical systems in his quest to achieve certainty. For example, Locke attempts to unify thought by limiting reason through a "reflective act of self-criticism" (Bonavec, 2003, p. 41). Although Kant finds Locke's effort insightful, he rejects his "physiological method" (CPR, A, p. xi). For Kant, Locke's attempt fell short of the revolution that philosophy badly needed but no one prior to his intervention had been able to provide. Kant thinks that his predecessors failed precisely because they were too stepped in the traditional way of doing philosophy. For him, the solution to the problem of metaphysics rested with rational systematization since, according to him, it was the only approach capable of yielding *a priori* knowledge. Based on this conviction, Kant shifts the philosophical discourse from the mind's ability to grasp a mind-independent reality to an examination of epistemological capacities of the faculty of reason: "What and how much can the understanding know apart from all experience?" (CPR, A, p. xvii)

Kant grants the limits of reason and yet insists that it was the only principle that offered us the chance of *a priori* knowledge. By allowing thought access into only the object it produces, observes Blumenberg, Kant is able to "trace the intuition of the objects back to the character of the faculty of intuition, and to trace the *a priori* concepts of experience back to the rules of the understanding" (1987, p. 599). In this way, Kant utilizes the Copernican turn to specify the limits of reason, in terms of the cognitive claims reason can possibly entertain, as well as devising ways to enable reason operate within its borders while specifying the contradictions that are generated when thought is extended beyond experience (Bonavec, 2003, p. 41). There is good reason to believe that the debate Kant has engendered in the history of Western philosophy establishes him as an intellectual great; an honor he shares with the likes of Galileo, Torricelli, and Stahl; themselves revolutionaries in their own right. These greats had earlier launched revolutions to salvage their respective fields. For example, Torricelli argued that physics could only make progress if it abandoned the notion of the scientist as a passive observer in favor of the model that compelled nature to respond to her specific questions based on certain *a priori* criteria (Guyer, 1987, p. 3).
Karl Popper agrees with this characterization:

> Even those who, like myself, cannot follow Kant all the way can accept his view that the experimenter must not wait until it pleases nature to reveal its secrets, but that he must question her. He must cross-examine nature in light of his doubts, his conjectures, his theories, and his inspirations. Here is a wonderful philosophical find. It makes it possible to look up science, whether theoretical or experimental, as a human creation, and to look upon its history as part of the history of ideas, on a level with the history of art or literature (1965, p. 181).

Popper further holds Kant's Copernican revolution significant not only for philosophy but for the whole of science. In his view, by having the subject contribute to the object of knowledge, Kant resolves the problem Copernicus created by denying the human person his rightful place in the world. It should be pointed out that Kant's intellectual revolution was not well-received by all. In Kant's wake, analytic insight erroneously read Kant and idealism as a rejection of external space (Rockmore, 2000, p. 174). Analytic philosophy arose at Cambridge University partly as a reaction

against German idealism. It will be the task of next section to examine Kant's relationship with analytic philosophy with a view to gaining insight into Kant's thought on metaphysics.

Kant and Analytic Philosophy

For the present, analytic philosophy will be understood as a movement that "places its greatest emphasis upon the study of language and its complexities" (Ammerman, 1965, p. 2). In relation to the assault on idealism, the pioneering role of Russell and Moore is scarcely in doubt, even as our main interlocutor will be Moore. Although several attacks were launched against German idealism, Moore's assault remains one of the more potent ones. Moore and Russell were familiar with the idealistic principle. In the 1890s, when the two were enrolled at Cambridge University, neo-Hegelianism was the predominant philosophical program of British universities (Ammerman, 1965).

Explaining his role in the revolt against idealism, Moser (2003) reportedly quoting Russell writes:

> It was toward the end of 1898 that Moore and I rebelled against both Kant and Hegel. Moore led the way, but I followed closely in his footsteps. I think that the first published account of the new philosophy was Moore's article in Mind (1899) on the "Nature of Judgment." Although neither he nor I would now adhere to all the doctrines in this article, I, and I think he, would still agree with its negative impact-i.e., with the doctrine that fact is in general independent of experience (p. 197-8).

Moore would later moderate his initial extreme philosophical realism, especially his views on the so-called existence of propositions and sensory objects (Baldwin, 1998). Nevertheless, his continuing influence relative to his attack on idealism persists to the contemporary era. Baldwin understands Moore's rejection of the claims of German idealism to revolve around three main concerns. First, against Berkeley's *Esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived) Moore observed that the doctrine obscured the nature of the relation of objects of perception to its content. As it relates to the Copernican turn, Moore reportedly conjectured that Kant mischaracterized *a priori* truths, making them dependent on thought. Against Bradley's effort to make relations necessarily internal, Moore opined that the philosopher distorted the exact nature of the relation of identity and difference (Baldwin, 1998).

Returning to Kant's Copernican turn, Moore avers that to the extent that Kant attempts to make the object dependent on the subject, his program fails. According to him, the idea negates a core principle of the Western philosophical tradition. Moore (1959) writes:

> It is a well-known fact in the history of philosophy that necessary truths in general, but especially those of which it is said that the opposite is inconceivable, have been commonly supposed to be analytic, in the sense that the proposition denying them was self-contradictory. It was in this way, commonly supposed, before Kant, that many truths could be proven by the law of contradiction alone (p. 12).

Moore, who accepts the principle of contradiction as the highest of philosophy, rejects any attempt to reduce objects of experience to "propositions," whose existence is believed to depend on thought.

New conceptual frameworks generally struggle with acceptability, since their import may elude their originators and interpreters alike. This is truer of Kant whose philosophical position is on all accounts difficult. Kant introduces a number of technical terms, and tends to assign even already established philosophical concepts new meanings. In this regard, transcendental and transcendent are clear examples. Kant construes transcendental an inquiry into the general conditions of possible experience, irrespective of "whether the inquiry in question takes into account what is real" (1992, p. 9). He renders transcendent to be something beyond experience. A further concern relates to the fact that the physical presentation of Kant's philosophical system leaves much to be desired. In a draft of a letter to Christian Garve, Kant (1783) acknowledges his struggles:

> I must admit that I have not counted on an immediately favorable reception of my work. That could not be, since the expression of my ideas-ideas that I have been working out painstakingly for twelve years in succession-was not worked out sufficiently to be generally understandable….people will get over the initial numbness caused unavoidably by a mass of unfamiliar concepts and even more unfamiliar language (p. 100).

In realization of the fact that Kant had done a sloppy job with the presentation of his philosophy, adherents of the critical philosophy offered to reconstruct his theory in accordance with its spirit while abandoning its letter.

What is more, Kant is committed to more than one theory. It is safe to say that Kant of the Copernican turn is conceptually different from the one of the categories. The Kant of the Copernican turn postulates an active subject that shapes what it knows in his attempt to explain knowledge; the latter Kant allows thought to apply the categories of the understanding to objects. Apparently, Kant made a discovery but was not exactly sure how to proceed with it. Although he discovered the autonomy of reason, he did not provide a theoretical account of the same in his first *Critique*. One of the criticisms Fichte has against Kant is that he did not push his account of freedom all the way and, therefore, ended up with inconsistencies. Taken together, these factors should explain why Moore may genuinely have misread Kant. However, we are also aware that scholars have the tendency to deliberately misrepresent the positions of their predecessors in order to pave the way for the emergence of their original theoretical insights. This notwithstanding, to interpret Kant's Copernican revolution as a denial of external space is mistaken. Ordinarily, it is impossible for a philosopher of Moore's stature to completely misunderstand Kant or idealism. Further, wowing to the complex nature of Kant's thought, it may not be a worthwhile idea rejecting competing interpretations. But the question may be posed: What is Kant's attitude toward metaphysics? The next section attempts a response to this question.

Kant and Metaphysics

Metaphysics defies a normative definition. In Western philosophy, the term was coined by Andronicus of Rhodes in his attempt to catalogue Aristotle's treatise on being that comes after the physics (Hamlyn, 1995, p. 556). Viewed as the science of being, the term is older than Aristotle and dates back to the pre-Socratic philosophers' attempts to comprehend nature. The difference though is that Aristotle's first philosophy represents the first systematic account of being as well as a criticism of his predecessors, for example, Plato's theory of the Forms (Hamlyn, 1995, p. 556). Plato makes the Forms the cornerstone of his thought, which he utilizes to distinguish between appearance and reality. For him, the Forms constitute the real and appearances their mirror images. On Plato's account, then, metaphysics is the science of ultimate reality. Aristotle accepts universals

but does not view them as the Forms and, moreover, does not grant them independent existence from objects of experience (Meta. 1040b, 27-31). If Rockmore is right, in Kant's time discussions about metaphysics tended to distinguish between good and bad metaphysics. He delineates that for Kant, "bad metaphysics" "incorrectly took up questions about the world, man (human being) and God which, since they surpassed experience, could not possibly be answered" (2000, p. xiv). Rockmore has Kant hold "good metaphysics" to be "synonymous with an inquiry into the most general conditions of knowledge" (2000, p. xiv). Thus, the distinction between bad and good metaphysics, merely latent in Descartes, becomes manifest in Kant. Kant rejects bad metaphysics in order to do good metaphysics. He rejects "bad metaphysics" because it allows thought access to objects not given in experience and, consequently, allows it to engage issues such as God, immortality of the soul, and freedom. By contrast, "good metaphysics" limits reason in what it can know, granting human reason insight only into possible experience. For Kant, then, metaphysics becomes the science of the limits of human reason. In this way, Kant reconstructs metaphysics redefining its scope and purpose.

Following from this, the case could be made that Kant's thought on metaphysics remains ambivalent. For example, in a draft of a letter April 8th 1766 to Moses Mendelssohn, Kant announces:

> I am far from regarding metaphysics itself, objectively considered, to be trivial or dispensable; in fact I have been convinced for some time now that I understand its nature and its proper place in human knowledge and that the true and lasting welfare of the human race depends on it….It befits brilliant men such as you to create a new epoch in this science, to begin completely afresh, to draw up the plans for this heretofore haphazardly construed discipline with a master's hand. As for the stock of knowledge currently available, which is now publicly up for sale, I think it best to pull off its dogmatic dress and treat its pretended insights skeptically (p. 55).

The metaphysics Kant rejects is the Leibnizian-Wolffian variant he inherited from the rationalist philosophical tradition. In rejecting bad metaphysics, Kant hopes to rid traditional metaphysics of its pretensions for he does not see how metaphysics can meaningfully engage such issues as God, immortality of the soul, and freedom without slipping into dogmatism. Like Descartes before him, Kant aims to transform metaphysics into epistemology without turning his back on metaphysics.

The distinction between what Kant considers good metaphysics and bad metaphysics is what Rockmore seems to understand better than Moore. In a series of essays, Rockmore makes a case for Kant's empiricism; yet he explains that the latter's strand of empiricism is different from the ordinary variant since "he refuses any knowledge of what is not either given or related to experience" (1992, p. 9). Although Kant's intellectual revolution in philosophy postulates an active subjectivity that in a way shapes its cognitive object; however, subjectivity remains an abstract epistemological principle: "Though all knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience" (CPR, B 1).

Following from this, Rockmore cautions against the rush to confuse Kant's "narrower" attack on metaphysics with a "wider" one; claiming that they are not one and the same. In the wake of Kant's attack on bad metaphysics, opposition to metaphysics in general has increased and could be found in traditions such as pragmatism, and the Vienna circle. Rockmore further intimates that a wider

rejection of metaphysics is further in evidence in the thought of figures such as Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche (Rockmore, 2000, p. xv). The attack on metaphysics continues in postmodernist thought, the movement that hastily declares metaphysics obsolete (Lowe, 1995, p. 559).Outside of philosophy, this hostility is prevalent within scientific circles. Scientists have contended that issues once engaged by metaphysics, for example, mind/body split and issues of space and time are now entertained by "empirical science" (Lowe, 1995, p. 559).

Kant and the Problem of Affection

The problem of affection is a fall-out from the metaphysical question. Following from our discussion, it may be concluded that Kant could not have rejected metaphysics as such since he was fully aware of the consequences. Understandably, with due respect to Fichte, although Kant discovered the autonomy of reason, he was aware that the Europe of his time was not ready for its radicalization and, therefore, elected to maintain a modest account of reason. In this regard, Kant was smarter than Fichte. Fichte's radicalization of Kant's modest account drew the atheism charge and, subsequently, led to his firing from the University of Jena. Fichte postulated the self that posited itself simultaneously as both the subject and object of knowledge. Without something to cause representation, Fichte was read as rejecting sensation from nature, including revelation. Among other things, Kant was a member of the Enlightenment, a movement that sought to subordinate everything, including politics and religion, to the authority of reason. He was also a product of Lutheran pietism, a seventeenth-century movement that tended to privilege the moral and emotional aspects of Christianity over the dogmatic and the ritualistic ones. Although Kant believed in the supremacy of reason, he was also committed to his faith and sought ways to maintain a balance. For example, in the wake of his publication of *Religion within the Limits of Reason* (1793), Kant was reprimanded by Friedrich William II, charging him with the misuse of philosophy to undermine Christianity and its Scriptures (Caygill, 1995, p. 10). Kant denied the charge and, moreover, promised never to do anything that would undermine the Scripture and Christianity. Philosophers, who struggled with the charge of atheism before Kant, included Spinoza, Hume, and Fichte (Solomon, 1987, p. 57).

There is good reason to believe that Kant's attempt to achieve this balance partially led him to postulating a split between noumena and phenomena. In a manner that seems to undermine the revolutionary character of this theory, which seems to dissolve the dichotomy between thought and sensibility, Kant entertains a split between the thing-as-itself and the thing-as-it-appears. In this way, Kant seems to follow the example of Plato, who postulates a split between the Forms and appearances, their copies. The difference though is that while Plato grants the person of nature and nurture access to the Forms, Kant makes the realm of noumena inaccessible to reason (CPR, A 379). For Kant, there is no way we can ascertain whether the object of knowledge corresponds to what causes it to appear. But the real difficulty Kant faces is enunciating the relationship between the noumena and phenomena.

It is important to note that Kant does not deny the existence of external space; rather he denies the ability of thought to comprehend objects that are not given in experience. By making the domain of noumena inaccessible to reason, Kant denies the understanding access to a mind-independent reality that could, under the right circumstances, be comprehended in its objective existence beyond experience. Precisely, Kant does not see how reason can have knowledge of God, immortality of the soul and human freedom, as claimed by traditional metaphysics. On his account, then, the mind cannot directly intuit its object. Metaphysically, Kant could be shown to postulate a thing-in-itself in order to account for what he calls the givenness of experience. Since we merely

discover the world in which we live, Kant may have intended to account for the origin of our empirical experience by granting a mind-independent reality that affects the mind. This has to be the case otherwise Kant will have to deal with uncaused representation. Specifically, with noumena, Kant leaves open the possibility of the mind receiving sensation from nature, including revelation.

Conclusion

This paper examines Kant's attitude toward metaphysis and the associated question of the problem of the Copernican turn. In the wake of his Copernican turn, which displaced activity from the object and locates the same in the subject, some read him to reject metaphysics. The paper dialogues with Moore in investigating Kant's anti-metaphysical credentials. It argued that, contrary to Moore, Kant is opposed to what might be termed "bad metaphysics" but accepts what might be described as "good metaphysics." Specifically, Kant rejects the system that allows the mind access to objects not given in experience, while restricting thought access to the condition of possible experience. Hence, Kant has an ambivalent attitude towards metaphysics. Seen as such, Kant's anti-metaphysical credentials need to be moderated or qualified.

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