Kant's

Critique of Pure Reason

Theodor W.

Adorno

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Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940*

KANT'S *CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON*

(1959)

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Edited by Rolf Tiedemann

Translated by Rodney Livingstone

Polity

Copyright © this translation Polity Press 2001

First published in Germany as Kants «Kritik der reinen Vernunft» © Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995

First published in 2001 by Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Published with the assistance of Inter Nationes, Bonn.

Editorial office:
Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Marketing and production:
Blackwell Publishers Ltd
108 Cowley Road
Oxford OX4 1JF, UK

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ISBN 0-7456-2183-X
ISBN 0-7456-2845-1 (pbk)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 10.5/12 pt Sabon
by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong
by TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

LECTURE ONE

12 May 1959

Methods and Intentions

Let me begin with the fiction that you do not yet know anything about the *Critique of Pure Reason.* This fiction is simultaneously legitimate and illegitimate. It is illegitimate since it is obvious that even today a work like Kant's epistemological *magnum opus* radiates such authority that everyone has heard something or other about it. However, in a deeper sense it is less of a fiction than it seems. We might begin by saying that whenever one aspect of a philosophy becomes public knowledge it tends generally to obscure its true meaning rather than to elucidate it. The formulae to which philosophies are commonly reduced tend to reify the actual writings, to sum them up in a rigid fashion and thus to make a genuine interaction with them all the harder. To make the point more specifically in relation to Kant, you have undoubtedly all heard that Kant's so-called Copernican revolution consisted in the idea that the elements of cognition that had previously been sought in the objects, in things-in-themselves, were now to be transferred to the subject, in other words to reason, the faculty of cognition.[1] In such a crude formulation this view of Kant is also false because, on the one hand, the subjective turn in philosophy is much older than Kant – in the modern history of philosophy it goes back to Descartes, and there is a sense in which David Hume, Kant's important English precursor, was more of a subjectivist than Kant. And

on the other hand, this widely held belief is mistaken because the true interest of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is concerned less with the subject, the turn to the subject, than with the objective nature of cognition.

If I may make a start with a programmatic statement, a sort of motto, encapsulating what you are about to hear, I would say that the Kantian project can actually be characterized not as one that adopts subjectivism in order to do away with the objectivity of cognition, but as one that grounds objectivity in the subject as an objective reality. It stands in contrast to the previously dominant view which downgraded objectivity by emphasizing the subject, and restricted it in a spirit of scepticism. This, we might say, is Kant's project in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and he himself has said so in a not very well-known passage in the Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I shall read it out to you at once because it may help to dispel a significant misunderstanding from the very outset. His enquiry, he says, has two sides, one of which is concerned with objects, while the other seeks 'to investigate the pure understanding itself, its possibility and the cognitive faculties upon which it rests; and so deals with it in its subjective aspect'.[2] He goes on to say that, important though this exposition is, it is not essential to his 'chief purpose', 'for the chief question is always this – what and how much can the understanding and reason know apart from all experience? Not: – how is the faculty of thought itself possible?'[3] I believe, therefore, that if you accept right from the start that the interest of the *Critique of Pure Reason* lies in its intention to establish the *objective nature* of cognition, or to *salvage* it, if I may anticipate my future argument, this will afford you a better access to the work than if you simply surrender to the widespread idea of Kant's so-called subjectivism.[4] This remains true even though these two aspects of Kant's philosophy are in constant friction with one another. *How*

this process of friction, how these two aspects, relate to one another in a series of configurations and how this gives rise to a whole set of problems – to explore this will be the task I have set myself in this lecture course.

But let me return to the fiction I started with. It is reasonable for me to assume that you have no preconceived notions about the *Critique of Pure Reason* because the traditional beliefs surrounding this work no longer survive. Once, some forty years ago, a very important philosopher of the day remarked wittily that a philosopher was someone who knew what was said in the books he had not read. And this remark could probably be said to have applied to the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In other words, the aura surrounding this book was so extraordinary at the time that even people unfamiliar with the text seem to have had a 'feeling' for what it contained – if you will pardon my use of this word; no other word will really do. The intellectual situation of our age is one in which no work belonging to the past really enjoys such authority any more, and certainly not Kant's *magnum opus*, for the simple reason that the school that dominated the German universities until around forty years ago has faded somewhat and has become something of a dead dog.[5] This was the Neo-Kantian school in its various guises – mathematical in Marburg and arts-orientated in south-west Germany. In consequence the *Critique of Pure Reason* is no longer able to derive any sort of traditional nourishment from that source either. I imagine, therefore, that you may well approach the *Critique of Pure Reason* with something of the feeling that it is like an old statue of the Great Elector,[6] an idol standing on its plinth gathering dust, something that the professors keep on discussing because, regrettably, they have been in the habit of doing so for the past 150 years, but not anything that need concern us overmuch today. What indeed are we supposed to do with it? You will probably have an idea that

the *Critique of Pure Reason* is concerned on the one hand with particular questions of scientific theory and that it is filled with discourses pertaining to the individual sciences, discourses that for the most part have now been superseded. For example, you will all have heard something to the effect that the Kantian theory of the *a priori* nature of time and space has been undermined by relativity theory, or that the Kantian theory of causality as an *a priori* category has been refuted by quantum mechanics. On the other hand, however, the narrower, more specifically philosophical questions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that is to say, those not connected with the grounding of the sciences – may well have lost something of their exalted status in your eyes. For when you hear the concept of 'metaphysics' – to mention the other term that forms the subject of the Kantian critique – you will not generally be thinking of the same concepts as formed the essence of metaphysics in Kant's eyes – that is to say, the concepts of God, freedom and immortality, or of the independence or the existence or non-existence of the soul. You have instead been brought up to find the true essence of metaphysics in such concepts as *Being [Sein].* Let me say right away that the so-called question of 'Being' does not represent an innovation when compared to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, or a happy rediscovery. We could rather say that Kant has some very definite and unambiguous comments to make about the question of 'Being' in a very central chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, namely the chapter on the Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection. And I may perhaps add that if you do not wish to capitulate to the current talk about 'Being' and to succumb helplessly to the suggestive power of this so-called philosophy of 'Being', it would be a very good thing for you to familiarize yourselves with these matters. It is not my wish to eliminate the problems involved here by proclaiming in a professorial manner that the *Critique of Pure Reason* is a God-given work with the kind of authority enjoyed by, say,

Plato for the last two thousand years, or to assert that we feel paralysed when confronted with these eternal values and unable to muster the necessary respect and the necessary interest. I would say that, on the contrary, such admonitions themselves smack of the impotence and hollowness implicit in any such concept of unchanging, eternal values.

I should like instead to do something else. I cannot deny that I still believe that this work is one that deserves the very greatest respect. It does so for quite objective reasons, albeit for reasons that are very different from those to which it owed its position when it first appeared. What I should like is to make this book speak to us. I should like to show you what interest the matters that are discussed in it can still hold for us today. And I should like to rehearse the experiences that underlie this work as objective realities, as experiences forming an essential part of the history of philosophy. I attempted something of the sort in my memorial lecture on Hegel that some of you may have heard.[7] So what I would like to do is to retranslate this philosophy from a codified, ossified system back into the kind of picture that results from a sustained X-ray examination. That is to say, I should like to urge you to conceive of this philosophy as a force field, as something in which the abstract concepts that come into conflict with one another and constantly modify one another really stand in for actual living forces. At the same time and as a matter of course – if I have any success at all in achieving my aims – an essential task will be to enable you to read the – very extensive – text of the *Critique of Pure Reason* for yourselves. I hope you will learn how to distinguish between its essential and less essential aspects, a crucial matter when reading Kant. And I hope also to make things come alive by presenting them in terms of a number of models. It is not my intention to give you lengthy paraphrases of the

Critique of Pure Reason, or to supply you with commentaries on particular passages. All that has been done countless times and those of you who would like such an approach can find more than enough examples of it in the secondary literature. Instead I shall try to introduce you to the core philosophical problems through the discussion of particular questions that I regard as being of central importance. But I shall do this, as I have said, not through the exposition of Kant's ideas as a complete philosophy, but as a kind of transcript of the intellectual experiences that lie behind them. And the concept of experience (or what I wish to show you of it) is not one that can be explained abstractly in advance. I would ask you not to expect me to start with a definition of what I mean by it; its meaning will become clear in the course of these lectures.

You will be curious to learn about the actual source of the intimidating reputation of this work as *the* philosophical work *par excellence.* A point in time when a tradition has come to an end and when the authority of books is no longer taken for granted has the advantage that it is possible to put such questions. I should like to tell you that if I have spoken of the loss of authority of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, this is not just an invention of mine. There are in fact philosophical trends today that really do regard the whole of Kant's philosophy as nothing more than a cult object that has now been superseded thanks to advances in scientific knowledge, and that far from calling for philosophical labour it can at best hope for a certain antiquarian interest. An example is Hans Reichenbach, the logical positivist, who has defended this point of view, with great courage, if not always with the requisite sensitivity, in his book *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* and in a number of other writings.[8]

You may well wonder from where a book like this one of Kant's actually derives its great authority – particularly

when you see that it says nothing about the major topics which might be thought to be of interest. To make this brutally clear to you: if you expect to find in the *Critique of Pure Reason* proofs for or against the existence of God or the immortality of the soul or of freedom, you will be sorely disappointed. It is true that there is no lack of such proofs, above all in the great second part of the Transcendental Logic, namely the Transcendental Dialectic. However, these proofs suffer from the grave defect that Kant has always arranged them ambiguously because he has always advanced them in the form of antinomies. What this means is that he has demonstrated that both the truth of these concepts and that of their opposites can be proved. What we have here is a theory of cognition, but a theory of cognition in a double sense. The first meaning is that it attempts to lay the foundations of the sciences that in Kant's eyes are established and free from doubt, that is to say, of mathematics and the natural sciences. The second meaning lies in his attempt to restrict the possibility of knowledge of those absolute concepts that you may be disposed to regard as the most important. You have to be clear about this. The *Critique of Pure Reason* does not polemicize against these concepts; for example, he does not deny the existence of God. And when Heine remarked, in the *History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, that the upshot of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that even the Lord of Lords is dying, 'wallowing – unproven – in his own blood', then the emphasis must be placed on the word *unproven*.[9] That is to say, what is limited is the possibility of proof; judgements about these categories as such are not made in the book. What constitutes the enormous significance of the book and what really changed the whole intellectual climate in a way that reverberates down to the everyday life of our minds today is probably the fact that it denied that certain questions were rational and hence banished them from our

horizons. Bernhard Groethuysen, the historian of ideas, has attempted to show in his writings how God and the devil disappeared from the world in the course of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – not as part of a trend towards atheism, but because the questions about them ceased to be asked.[10] Now we might say that the achievement of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that a whole series of these great metaphysical, fundamental concepts vanished from the horizon of what could be rationally decided. And in the same way, modern theology, as it has been developed by Karl Barth, following Søren Kierkegaard, has insisted with great feeling on placing the categories of theology in extreme opposition to knowledge and has argued that what applies to them is the paradoxical concept of faith. If this has been possible it is because it is implicit in the Kantian situation, in the sense that the sharp distinction that Kant made between knowledge and those metaphysical categories is a fundamental premise for us today.

Thus if we are to speak of the *critique* of pure reason, this critique must be regarded as neither a negative reply, nor indeed as a reply of any sort, to the fundamental questions of philosophy. It is rather a critique *of* those questions. It is a critique of the ability of reason to pose such questions, to do them justice. We may say perhaps that the enormous impact of the *Critique of Pure Reason* has its source in the circumstance that it was in effect the first work to give expression to the element of bourgeois resignation, to that refusal to make any significant statement on the crucial questions, and instead to set up house in the finite world and explore it in every direction, as Goethe phrased it.[11] This is a very different kind of outlook from the radical atheism of the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment such as Helvétius or La Mettrie or Holbach, who really did give negative answers and in whose thought reason was sufficiently confident to make statements about the

Absolute. It is precisely this that is restricted in Kant. The crucial feature of the Kantian work (and this will perhaps give you an insight into its inner nature) is that it is guided by the conviction that reason is denied the right to stray into the realm of the Absolute, to 'stray into intelligible worlds', as he terms it.[12] This explains why we can stand with both feet firmly planted on the ground and it is thanks to this that we really know what it is that we can positively and definitely know.

We might almost say, then, that what has been codified in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is a theodicy of bourgeois life which is conscious of its own practical activity while despairing of the fulfilment of its own utopia. The power of the *Critique of Pure Reason* resides not so much in its responses to the so-called metaphysical questions as in its highly heroic and stoical refusal to respond to these questions in the first place. What makes this possible for Kant is the self-reflexive nature of reason. By this I mean that, as a rational being, I am capable of reflecting on my own reason, and through this reflection I am able to give myself an account of what it can and cannot achieve. This dual aspect of self-reflexivity is what enables Kant to claim that he has established the foundation of experience – in other words the original leading concepts of our knowledge of nature; and on the other hand, it is what prevents us from going beyond this knowledge and entering into speculations about the Absolute.

Nevertheless, I should say at this point that the idea of the self-reflexivity of reason contains a difficulty and also a challenge that only emerged fully in post-Kantian philosophy and the philosophy of German idealism in the narrower sense. The difficulty is that we can enquire, how can reason criticize itself? Does not the fact that it criticizes itself mean that it is always caught up in a prejudice? That is to say, when reason judges the possibility of making absolute

statements, does this not necessarily imply that it has already made statements about the Absolute? And in fact post-Kantian idealism did take up this quite simple idea and turn it *against* Kant. Perhaps the crucial distinction between Kant and his successors is that in Kant the reflexivity of reason is conceived in a quite straightforward way, much as with the English empiricists who similarly dissect the mechanisms of reason. It is true that at one point Kant does make fun of the concept of the physiology of reason that he found in Locke and which ventured something of the sort.[13] But when we look more closely at what he has himself done in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we discover that it is not all that far removed from such a physiology of reason, that is, from a dissection of reason, albeit in the case of Kant 'on the basis of principles'. In contrast his successors then faced up to the question of what it *means* for reason to criticize itself – and they were led by that question both to criticize Kant and to infer a series of answers that Kant himself was initially unwilling to provide with his critique.

But I believe that it would be good for you to grasp the idea that, for all Kant's notorious reputation for difficulty, he was a relatively straightforward writer inasmuch as he believed – without wasting too much time thinking about it – that reason is able to treat of the realm of reason, the realm of knowledge, just as effectively as any other field of knowledge. Connected with this – and this is a further prerequisite for understanding Kant that is absolutely indispensable if you wish to see what is involved in his philosophy – connected with this is the fact that underlying Kant's philosophy lies a huge confidence in the mathematical natural sciences; and that his philosophy is absolutely full of the spirit of these sciences. If we wish to grasp the chief inspiration of the whole *Critique of Pure Reason*, we might locate it in the idea that the attempts of metaphysics to arrive at absolute certainties by spinning

them out of mere thought have all failed – and Hume was right to criticize them. But this does not mean that we should despair because, thanks to the persuasive force of the mathematical sciences – particularly mathematics itself and what today we would call theoretical physics – we possess an entire body of knowledge that actually does satisfy the criterion of absolute truth. Kant's achievement only becomes comprehensible on the assumption that science provides the absolute knowledge which merely abstract speculation had failed to deliver.

I believe that to say this is enough to eliminate one of the difficulties that tend to crop up in the mind of the so-called naive reader who embarks upon the *Critique of Pure Reason* for the first time. For Kant begins with the question '*How are synthetic a priori judgements possible*?' (This comes in the Introduction and it is explored at length in the course of the book.[14]) This is one of the chief questions of the *Critique of Pure Reason.* Without bothering with any long drawnout preambles I should like to say something about the significance of this question. But first I want to comment on the shock contained in the expression '*How* are they possible?' For when the speculative philosopher approaches this book he expects a completely different question, namely, *Are* synthetic *a priori* judgements, in other words, absolutely valid statements, possible? This question is not put in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[15] You can see here plainly how difficult it is to understand a work simply by reading the text, without any prior assumptions. And if a lecture course like this one (and every lecture course on comparable topics) has any justification beyond the mere fact that it is advertised in the university lecture programme, this justification must surely be sought in the realization that such works cannot simply be understood on their own. This is not meant in the ominous schoolmasterly sense that you need to know the historical context so as to

be able to place them correctly – I am quite indifferent to such matters – but in order to grasp the fact that the problems under discussion are only comprehensible if you are familiar with certain force fields within which philosophies may be said to move.

Kant's work is called *The Critique of Pure Reason*, and the emphasis here doubtless falls on the word 'critique'. In essence there is nothing new in this since we might say that the entire history of philosophy is nothing but one vast nexus of criticism which has led consciousness to its ideas, its concepts and ultimately to itself. In this sense the *Critique of Pure Reason* is an encounter of philosophy with itself. Thus what I wish to say is that this strange formula '*How* are synthetic *a priori* judgements possible?' does become meaningful and at the same time it reveals something of the entire complexion, the inner workings of Kant's thought. It does so because what is truly substantial, the element that seems to constitute its unquestionable truth, manifests itself in the shape of the synthetic *a priori* judgements and because it does not spin the truth abstractly from within itself, but proceeds from the truth, as Kant calls it, as if from a 'given', and sticks to knowledge that it holds to be true and absolute.

Let me tell you right away what synthetic *a priori* judgements are. Forgive me if I speak at a rather basic level, but if I am to take seriously my own fiction that you know nothing of Kant, there is no other way forward. I must start by telling you what a *judgement* is. You all have a more or less vague idea of what is meant, but I am sure it is vague. In the old tradition of logic, judgements were defined as the union of subject, predicate and copula – that is to say, an object which corresponds in grammatical terms to a subject has something *different* predicated of it. This is expressed in the form of 'is', as in 'A is B'. This is a somewhat superficial characterization of a judgement because it presupposes

that these components are discrete entities, which is not in fact the case. Moreover, the implied identity of A = B is problematic because in general the concept beneath which a specific thing is subsumed is always broader than that thing, so that the judgement is both identical and non-identical. You encounter difficulties of all kinds here with the consequence that a judgement is defined as a state of affairs of which it is meaningful to ask whether it is true or false. If such a state of affairs is expressed in words it is customary to call it a *proposition [Satz],* but this distinction plays no significant role in Kant. In Kant we hear generally of 'judgements', even though it is propositions that are generally meant and not the interconnections between primitive, pre-linguistic concepts.

Judgements may be synthetic or analytic. This means that the concept in the predicate adds something to the concept in the subject, or, more precisely, the concept in the predicate is not contained in that of the subject. Where that is *not* the case, that is to say, if we have a judgement that adds something new and is what we may call an 'ampliative judgement', then we speak of synthetic judgements. And where *that* is not the case, where the predicate is simply a repetition of the subject, where it is implied in the definition of the subject, then we speak of analytic judgements. In that case the judgement is a mere analysis, a mere analysis of its own subject; it merely makes explicit what is already contained in the subject. In other words, analytic judgements are really all tautologies.

Kant combines these concepts with the additional concepts of *a priori* and *a posteriori.* It is self-evident that the analytic judgements are all *a priori*, that is to say, they are valid absolutely and unconditionally – precisely because they are tautologous. Because they are actually not judgements at all, they cannot be refuted. They are simply repetitions of definitions that are presupposed. Synthetic

judgements, on the other hand, can be either *a priori* or *a posteriori.* This means that if you make a statement about something, form a judgement about it, then this judgement may either arise from experience (Kant would say) or it can be necessary even though it is not already contained in the concept. Thus if you say, 'All men are mortal', that is a judgement of experience, since mortality is not implicit as such in the concept of 'men'. However, when you say 'All bodies are extended', that is a synthetic *a priori* judgement.[16] It means that extension is not contained in the concept of the body, but notwithstanding that all bodies necessarily possess the quality of extension.

You will now ask me – and this brings me back to the Great Elector and to the question of whether he has a wig or a pigtail – you may well object: for goodness' sake, this is supposed to be the most important work in the history of philosophy and now we have to endure an account of how synthetic *a priori* judgements are possible. We have to put up with listening to the assertion that judgements are possible which say something new, but which are valid for all time ... On this point we have to say that the concept of truth in Kant – and this is profoundly bound up with bourgeois thought – is itself that of a timeless truth. 'To be absolute' for Kant means as much as to be irrefutable by the passage of time; an absolutely secure possession; something that cannot be taken away from you, that you can keep safe in your own hands for ever. The concept of a timeless truth, the concept that only that which is timeless can be genuinely true, whereas whatever can be refuted cannot really aspire to the concept of truth – that is one of the innermost driving forces of Kantian philosophy. And if, finally, the idea of immortality appears as one of the supreme ideas, that provides you with the key to the enormous emotional weight that this concept of an *a priori* status has in Kant. What he is concerned with in his work is

a kind of tendering of accounts in which he seeks to crystallize those truths that I end up possessing with absolute certainty, without incurring any debts and without their being exposed to any claims through the passage of time. Incidentally, what may seem to you to be rather philistine analogies from the bourgeois world of commerce play a major role in Kant and in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. And I may tell you that they are profoundly related to what is magnificent about Kant, to his particular kind of sobriety, of self-possession, even when confronted by the most sublime and impressive objects. It is all quite inseparable from his bourgeois and philistine cast of mind. In all probability you will do better to seek the core of Kantian metaphysics in this sobriety than at the point where he seems more directly metaphysical.

Thus this interest in synthetic *a priori* judgements is connected with the fact that Kant really does require truth to be timeless. I should like to point out to you already at this stage that this is the site of one of the profoundest difficulties in Kant. On the one hand, he perceives, like no one before him, that time is a necessary condition of knowledge, and hence of every instance of allegedly timeless knowledge, and that it exists as a form of intuition. On the other hand, he perceives the passage of time as a kind of flaw, and something that truly authoritative knowledge ought to avoid. This explains why the question of whether and how synthetic *a priori* judgements are possible occupies such a key position in the *Critique of Pure Reason.*

LECTURE TWO

14 May 1959

The Concept of the Transcendental (I)

I should like to begin by correcting a misunderstanding or rather a crude blunder that I made in the heat of battle, so to speak, towards the end of the last lecture. I gave you a completely idiotic example of a synthetic *a priori* judgement – it is the kind of thing that sometimes happens when you try to compress too much into the final moments of a class. Needless to say, the statement ‘all bodies are extended’ is an analytic judgement, not, as I stupidly said, synthetic – at least, inasmuch as we are speaking of the definition of bodies in geometry, or more precisely, stereometry. An instance of a synthetic judgement – and this is the classical example that is always cited – ‘all bodies are heavy’. This is because the concept of weight is not already contained in three-dimensionality.[1]

But the need to clarify this misunderstanding gives me the opportunity to point to a problem that really does exist here – a very serious problem, as it happens. This is that it is very difficult to make a clear distinction between analytic and synthetic judgements on the basis of single examples. There is, for example, the question of whether propositions in mathematics are synthetic, as Kant claimed, or analytic, as Leibniz believed and as has since been reiterated by modern mathematicians. I may refer you to Henri Poincaré’s

well-known assertion that the whole of mathematics is nothing but a single tautology. The answer to this question depends largely on the context within which such claims are made. For example – I am improvising somewhat here, without being able to guarantee the scientific accuracy of my statements, but I am concerned more with the general argument than with what happens to be the case in the different sciences – if you take the definition of a body in chemistry, where weight is one of the basic elements, then the proposition that all bodies are heavy can be analytic, while it was synthetic in the realm of mathematics. These are highly complex questions, as is in general the question whether logical forms such as judgement, inference and concept can be defined in isolation or whether they can only be grasped in the context of the intellectual systems or structures in which they appear. These are questions that have emerged only in the course of modern developments in logic.[2] Hence in order to understand Kant, or indeed in order to understand any thinker, you need to make certain assumptions; this holds good for all intellectual activities that are to be found between heaven and earth. If you refuse to make any assumptions, if you attempt to understand a thing purely on its own terms, then you will understand nothing. I shall return to this point in a moment. In the case of Kant you have to assume – and this is essential for an understanding of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in general – that the whole of traditional logic is in place. There is a passage in the *Critique of Pure Reason* where he asserts in all innocence that, apart from a few improvements, logic has made no progress since Aristotle, and nor could it have done.[3] In consequence, in his conception of logic he simply cleaves to the traditional Aristotelian logic which makes a clear distinction between the different categories in ways familiar to us – namely in accordance with the practice of a linguistic analysis, and

without taking any notice whatever of the interconnections between the categories of logic and the systems to which they refer.

I shall also take this opportunity to draw a further point to your attention, one that has a bearing on the importance of the concept of reason for an understanding of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. You will come to hear of all sorts of concepts of reason in Kantian philosophy. There is the concept of reason in the mathematical natural sciences which I spoke about last time and which I told you was appropriate for synthetic *a priori* judgements since it refers to highly generalized propositions that provide a foundation for judgements of experience. Then comes the concept of empirical reason that refers to material, factual judgements falling within our experience. After that we have the metaphysical judgements about which I shall have something to say today and which provide the critical, or if you prefer, the negative object of the *Critique of Pure Reason.* And lastly, there are the judgements of practical philosophy that in a certain sense establish links between them all. Now, I believe – and this is something that is very easily overlooked in discussions of Kant – that you can only understand the interconnections between all these realms, which Kant himself sometimes brings together and sometimes sharply contrasts, if you realize that the distinctions between them presuppose an element of sameness, of identity, that enables them to be measured against one another. This unifying factor is reason itself. In other words, then, reason is the canon of propositions as they have been codified in the traditional, bivalent logic, that is to say, in a system of logic that is based pre-eminently on the principle of identity – in other words, the postulate that a concept should retain the same meaning – and the principle of contradiction, namely that where there are two contradictory judgements only one can be true. In

Kant’s view every procedure that adheres to these principles is rational. And the unifying factor, the factor that joins these different aspects of philosophy together and is tested out in its various fields, is the mode of reason as defined once and for all by the principles of formal logic, accepted uncritically though these may be. For their part, the distinctions arise from the application of this same reason to different objects. By distinctions I am referring here both to the distinctions operating within the *Critique of Pure Reason* and, on a larger scale, the distinctions obtaining between the various elements of the Kantian system of which theoretical reason forms only a part. That is to say, the distinctions in this entire system of thought, in the critique of reason and beyond, always arise from a reason that is thought of as identical in its application to different objects. It remains identical however it is applied. It may be applied to sensible matter, to the so-called pure intuitions. Or it may be applied to the employment of reason beyond the realm of any conceivable experience and as a guide to action – where it is assumed that inasmuch as these actions are freely performed, they are not subject to any fixed obligation. Or finally, it may be applied to its use in formal logic, that is to say, in the quintessential realm of reason, the realm of formal rules without regard to any content whatever. Kant’s concern is always that reason should not be criticized from the point of view of pure logic, that is to say, the task facing reason is not to discover whether it is internally coherent – for the validity of logic is everywhere taken for granted and reason itself is held to be identical with logical thinking. Instead the meaning of Kantian reason is always that reason should reflect on its own possible relationship with objects of different kinds. And as I pointed out last time, it is always assumed – and this is a very bold assumption – that reason is capable of making an authoritative statement, a really compelling statement

about its own relation to these objects. I wanted to make these points as footnotes to what was said previously.

I should like now to return once more to the question of the enormous burden represented in Kantian philosophy by these so-called synthetic *a priori* judgements which I attempted to explain to you in some detail last time. Perhaps you will allow me to return at this point to my fiction that you have come here without any knowledge of Kant. In addition, many of you will have come to a course of lectures on philosophy bringing with you some idea of thought without any preconceptions. That is reasonable enough since in your specialist subjects you will often find yourselves confronted by material or formal disciplines that are themselves based on a variety of assumptions. You will then be told that we are not competent to test these assumptions, we are not competent to say anything definitive about the nature of time or space, or to decide what history is or the essence of humanity, or whatever it happens to be. But to test assumptions *in general* – that is said to be the task of philosophy … The consequence of this, of course, is that you will expect philosophy to be free of assumptions because it is philosophy that makes possible the assumptions underlying every conceivable individual discipline of whatever sort.

There are two points to be made here. First, to insist on this is to make excessive demands on philosophy – or rather, you are in effect coming to philosophy with a highly specific preconception, one that is indeed sanctioned in great measure by the history of Western metaphysics, but which turns out on closer inspection to be not quite as self-evident as might be imagined. A mode of thought that is absolutely free of assumptions would in reality be a kind of thought that is tied to nothing but pure thought itself. In other words, the philosophical problem *par excellence*, namely the problem of the relation of consciousness to its

objects, of the subject to the object, would be prejudiced in a quite specific sense, namely in the idealist sense that everything that exists is the subject, that is, consciousness or spirit. Only if that were the case, only if spirit could itself generate all the preconditions of all knowledge without reference to anything alien to itself, would the postulate of a knowledge free of assumptions be satisfied. Even then it would be problematic, since the supreme presupposition, the assumption that might be thought of as the basis of every conceivable judgement, could not itself be inferred from anything prior. At this point even Fichte may be said to have come to terms with the fact that there are givens; although Fichte's is the only philosophy to have made a serious attempt to implement this project of a philosophy without assumptions. In reality what we see here in this entire clamour for a philosophy without preconceptions is something I have described, somewhat disrespectfully, as the mania for foundations [*Fundierungswahn]*.[4] This is the belief that everything which exists must be derived from something else, something older or more primordial. It is a delusion built on the idealist assumption that every conceivable existent thing can be reduced to mind or, I almost said, to Being – and 'Being' is itself a mediated, mental concept. And I would say that one of the overdue revisions that philosophy today should demand from your pre-philosophical expectations of it is that you should liberate yourselves from this 'mania for foundations', and that you should not always feel the need to begin at the very beginning. For such a presumption implies the belief that there is nothing new under the sun and that everything can be reduced to what has always existed – and the consequence of that would be to make the problems of history and of change in general absolutely insoluble.[5] So you should relinquish any expectation that Kantian philosophy should dispense with every assumption, and in

general you should desist from making any such demands on philosophy at all. Instead you should seek to understand the role of so-called assumptions *within* the movement of a system of thought. I believe that if you do this you will make more progress than simply by posing mechanical questions such as, Yes, but does this not assume that such-and-such is the case … ? and does this not presuppose something or other … ?, a type of question that I would call infantile. For that is precisely what children do when they reply, Yes, but…, to every explanation you give, and when they find that they cannot stop asking questions because they do not understand the matter in hand, but instead just keep on asking questions mechanically. That is to say, they just keep on asking for the sake of asking without ever responding to the resistance in the matter in hand, the resistance created by what it actually refers to.

The second point to be made is that Kant's philosophy is no more devoid of assumptions than any other. And it is certain (and this is what actually motivates me in my entire approach to inducting you into the critique of reason) that if you were to attempt to understand his philosophy without any presuppositions, entirely on its own terms, without any knowledge of the status of the categories in his thought, you would fail utterly. Take, for example, the central concept that his critique of reason is based on, the concept of the transcendental, of which he maintains in one of the decisive passages of the book that it (namely the synthetic unity of apperception) is the highest point to which he has 'attached' his entire philosophy.[6] Even this concept is not derived by Kant from something else but is in a certain sense assumed in the course of his account. I shall read you an instance of this, one that is interesting because it concerns the spiritualcore of Kant's philosophy, the inner essence of reason, which, however, manifests itself, curiously enough, as something simply given. He states in a