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KNOWLEDGE, REASON, NOUMENON. THE RATIONAL LEGITIMACY OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND META-EMPIRICAL THOUGHT IN THE LIGHT OF KANT'S *CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON*

Abstract

The objective of this contribution is to present a counterargument to the view that religious faith is inherently incompatible with reason due to its lack of scientific evidence. To this end, it will draw upon the insights of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. It will be demonstrated that the distinction between the meta-empirical sphere and that of the scientific understanding does not imply the irrationality of the former for Kant. This is because, while reason encompasses understanding, it is not constrained by it. On the contrary, defining the boundaries of the sphere accessible to scientific investigation implies recognising the space outside those boundaries, the definition of which is made possible by the operational instrument of noumenon. While this result does not contradict scientific reason, it does allow the boundaries of the two spheres to be defined in a non-conflicting way and implies that the meta-empirical sphere is a legitimate area of endeavor. The result of these considerations is to demonstrate that any stance which, in the name of a misconceived scientificity, denies in principle any possible metascientific or religious perspective on reality, is ultimately unreasonable. Rather, such a stance is based on implicit metaphysical assumptions.

Keywords: Kant · religious belief · limits of scientific knowledge · faith and reason · critique of scientism

0. Summary

The objective of this paper is to elucidate how, from a Kantian perspective, science and religion are not in opposition to each other and are not mutually exclusive. Rather, it is necessary to delineate the boundaries between them in order to clarify their relationship and their respective limits. The objective here is not to provide a comprehensive philological analysis, but rather to demonstrate how, from a Kantian standpoint, it is possible to tackle the question of *scientism* as a frequently misconstrued issue in the broader

discussion on the relationship between faith and science. The notion that science offers not only an accurate representation of reality but also the sole viable one, precluding the consideration of alternative perspectives, has indeed become almost mainstream and part of the contemporary worldview.¹

The central argument presented is that it is possible to comprehend and philosophically substantiate – from a Kantian standpoint – the compatibility of a religious worldview with a scientific one. In order to achieve this objective, we shall investigate the Kantian position, beginning with an examination of the distinction between knowing and thinking (paragraph 2). If, as Kant asserts, knowing is constrained by the limits of experience and requires the input of sensible intuition, it is also true that this does not exhaust the domain of rationality. The realm of non-empirical noumenal entities, which can be purely thought of but not known, still falls within the domain of reason, even if not within that of scientific knowing. The necessity of the meta-empirical sphere for establishing the status of the domain in which scientific understanding operates will be demonstrated (paragraphs 3-5). This distinction enables the legitimization of belief in meta-empirical entities within the framework of a critical account of reason (paragraph 6) and the delineation of the boundaries between the domain of science and that of metaphysics and faith, thereby ensuring the respect of the limits and domain of both. While it is valid to assert that faith should not purport to make scientific statements concerning the development of the physical world and related domains, it is equally important to recognise that scientific knowledge is not capable of making a totalising claim to provide a definitive image of the world, a task that falls outside its domain of competence. This is a matter that is better suited to the realms of metaphysical thought and religious belief (paragraph 7).

1. Introductory Remarks on the Purpose of the Contribution

It is widely acknowledged that Immanuel Kant's contributions to religious thought are no less innovative and revolutionary than his contributions to the theory of knowledge, metaphysics, and moral philosophy.² In particular,

- 1 The reference is specifically to those positions that seek to argue against the possibility of faith on the grounds of its purported incompatibility with scientific evidence. This approach was pervasive in contemporary discourse until recently and could be exemplified by the movement of so-called 'New Atheism', which is championed by figures such as Richard Dawkins. Apart from Dawkins (2006), this type of approach can also be found in Daniel Dennett (1995), Victor J. Stenger (2007), Schmidt-Salomon (2014), and others. The thesis of Jerry Coyne (2015) is particularly illustrative of this perspective. He posits an incompatibility between science and religion, whereby the two would make 'competing' statements about the same reality and are therefore in a state of conflict. This conflict, he suggests, can only be resolved in favour of science. This viewpoint is antithetical to the one presented in this contribution. Nevertheless, the contemporary landscape is not lacking in conciliatory perspectives, such as that offered by Kries & Clayton (2018).
- 2 On the subject of religion and related issues in Kant, cf. Insole (2020); Wood (2020); Godlove (2014); Löttsch (1976).

it is evident that there is a coherent continuity between his critique of the foundations of metaphysics,³ which characterises the writings of his ‘critical’ period, and his critique of that part of metaphysics that has God as its object and thus lies at the foundation of religion. It is evident that traditional theology is also subject to this critique. Even if one were to argue for a conciliatory interpretation, which emphasises the constructive aspects of Kant’s thought with respect to theology, one would still be confronted with a *Copernican revolution* in this field (Galbraith 1996: ch. 1). This would entail a significant reversal of the classical way of thinking.⁴

The objective of this paper is not to examine Kant’s stance on religion, faith and God from the perspective of his practical philosophy, nor to evaluate his arguments for or against the existence of God. Furthermore, it does not address his scepticism, as evidenced in works such as *Träumen eines Geistesehers* (Kant 1920). The focus will be on the possibility of religious faith insofar as this is admitted by the structure of human reason as set out by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁵ Attention will therefore be drawn primarily to this work, which marks the beginning of Kant’s critical period. It is primarily a matter of a pure possibility, namely, the admission of the non-contradictory nature of faith in relation to this structure. It is not, and indeed cannot be, an affirmative account of the veracity of religious belief or the existence of God, given the assumptions of Kantian philosophy.⁶ The outcome is nevertheless of considerable significance, as it illuminates the pivotal question of the relationship between faith and rationality. Furthermore, it can contribute to the elucidation of numerous misconceptions that arise in contemporary discourses on the relationship between science and religion, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

2. Fundamental Distinctions. Understanding and Sensibility; Knowing and Thinking

The distinction between *knowing* (*Erkennen*) and *thinking* (*Denken*) is a fundamental systematic distinction made by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and precisely in the Transcendental Analytic. This distinction can be linked to the ‘architectonical’ distinction within the theoretical part of Kant’s thought between *empirical experience*, which is the domain of knowing, and *metaphysics*, which is the realm of thinking. The distinction between knowing

3 On the positive sense that Kant ascribes to metaphysics, see Allais (2015: 290 ff.).

4 For Kant’s thought on religion in relation to modern theology, see Davidovich (1993).

5 A recent comprehensive critical study, which also takes into account the historical context of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, has been provided by de Boer (2020).

6 It is evident that Kant himself is opposed to the exercise of faith in the sense of revealed religion, which he considers to be of benefit only in cultivating a moral disposition (Ward 2019). Consequently, the present contribution will endeavour to argue against Kant with Kantian tools.

and mere thinking hinges on the fact that, whereas the latter is based on simple concepts, the former necessitates not only concepts but also sensible intuitions. It is noteworthy that the explicit expression of this distinction occurs at the beginning of paragraph 22 of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which marks the culmination of the transcendental deduction. In this context, Kant attempts to justify the empirical use of categories, or their applicability to sensible experience, with the aim of defending them – as meta-empirical structural elements of experience – from the empiricist critique (this critique is carried out, for example, in a well-known manner by Hume).

While the object is merely thought through the concepts of the understanding (categories), it is only through the addition of a non-conceptual, but intuitive component (*Anschauung*) that it is also given:

“Thus as long as intuition is lacking, one does not know whether one thinks an object through the categories, and whether there can ever be any object that even fits them; and so it is confirmed that the categories are not by themselves *cognitions*, but mere *forms of thought* for making cognitions out of given intuitions” (Kant 1998: 334).

This intuitive component does not refer to the conditions of pure thought; rather, it refers to those of pure sensibility. The pure forms of the latter are time and space. These, in turn, are what enable something objectual to be given:

“Now the object cannot be given to a concept otherwise than in intuition, and, even if a pure intuition is possible *a priori* prior to the object, then even this can acquire its object, thus its objective validity, only through empirical intuition, of which it is the mere form. Thus all concepts and with them all principles, however *a priori* they may be, are nevertheless related to empirical intuitions, i.e., to *data* for possible experience. Without this they have no objective validity at all, but are rather a mere play, whether it be with representations of the imagination or of the understanding” (Kant 1998: 341).

The result of the investigations carried out in the Transcendental Analytic is therefore this:

“That the understanding can never accomplish *a priori* anything more than to anticipate the form of a possible experience in general, and, since that which is not appearance cannot be an object of experience, it can never overstep the limits of sensibility, within which alone objects are given to us. Its principles are merely principles of the exposition of appearances, and the proud name of an ontology, which presumes to offer synthetic *a priori* cognitions of things in general in a systematic doctrine (e.g., the principle of causality), must give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding” (Kant 1998: 345).

It is widely acknowledged that the fundamental methodological distinction made in the Transcendental Analytic provides the foundation for the critique of metaphysics presented in the second part of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, namely the Transcendental Dialectic. In the latter, the three traditional metaphysical disciplines – ‘rational psychology’ (the doctrine of the soul), ‘rational cosmology’ (the doctrine of the world as a totality) and ‘rational theology’ (the doctrine of God) – are subjected to criticism on the grounds that they represent attempts by speculative reason to venture beyond the limits of possible experience with its bare concepts. In other words, in these metaphysical adventures discussed in the Transcendental Dialectic, reason would attempt to overcome the condition imposed on it by the results of transcendental Aesthetic and Analytic, namely, that it must always refer its pure concepts to a sensible intuition given in space and time. The outcome of this endeavour would be futile, resulting in speculations that circumvent all scientific criteria of empirical verifiability. This is the context in which Kant’s criticism of the rational demonstration of meta-empirical objects, such as the existence and immortality of the soul and, above all, the existence of God as a necessary being, should be understood. When it comes to God and religious belief, it should then be kept in mind that there are good reasons to argue that Kant’s concept of God is *deflationary* (Godlove 2014: 158 ff.), at least from the perspective just mentioned.

3. The Land of Understanding and the Ocean of Reason

It is now evident that, in addition to a clear negative outcome for the notion of religious belief, this perspective also yields a positive result. The Kantian analyses conducted in the Transcendental Analytic demonstrate that the categories of thought are applicable only to experience. This is evidenced by the negative result, as outlined in the Dialectic, which indicates that the categories cannot be applied outside of possible experience. This process of ‘cutting out’ and delimitation thus demarcates the limits of a possible science, which coincide with the scope of the possible application of pure concepts of thought to sensible experience. The negative consequence of this is that traditional metaphysical themes, including the existence of God, fall outside the sphere of science.

It should be noted, however, that this result corresponds to only one of the possible perspectives that can be assumed in this context. From another perspective, if this work of delineating the boundaries of science results in the exclusion of everything that lies outside of it, it also opens up the positive result of recognising that there is a whole dimension that lies outside of this domain, even if it is not amenable to scientific treatment in the strict sense. This leads us to the architectonic question of the relationship between *reason* (*Vernunft*) and *understanding* (*Verstand*). The domain of science is defined

by the understanding, in so far as its concepts relate to sensible intuition. This is what Kant calls “the land of truth”, which he understands as an island

“surrounded by a broad and stormy ocean, the true seat of illusion, where many a fog bank and rapidly melting iceberg pretend to be new lands and, ceaselessly deceiving with empty hopes the voyager looking around for new discoveries, entwine him in adventures from which he can never escape and yet also never bring to an end” (Kant 1998: 339).

The stormy ocean outside the land of truth is, of course, the sphere of metaphysics, the land of illusion, which will be addressed by Transcendental Dialectics.

Nevertheless, the restricted scope of the understanding (or *intellect*), safeguarded from the tumult and instability of this vast ocean – which can only be traversed at the risk of embarking on speculative adventures – does not coincide with that of reason. Reason⁷ is a wider concept precisely because it is capable of *thinking* things that the intellect cannot *know*. It is precisely Kant’s system that, by restricting scientific knowledge to the sphere of the understanding but not confining rationality to the latter, allows and even demands a divergence, an overflow of rationality beyond the limits of the empirical-scientific intellect, and an extension of the *intelligible* beyond the realm of the *understandable*. The understanding includes that part of rationality which is the domain of scientific knowledge in the strict sense. However, it is not the entirety of rationality; rather, it constitutes a ‘subset’ thereof. The distinction between scientific knowledge based on the understanding, which inevitably draws upon sensible intuition, and the use of concepts outside this domain, which lacks any possible reference to intuition, allows us to delineate the boundaries between science and metaphysics. *This boundary, however, is a boundary within rationality itself*. Consequently, we find that Kant extends the notion of rationality considerably beyond the domain of scientific knowledge, to encompass any form of thinking that is not scientific in the strict sense, yet is not therefore entirely at odds with reason and therefore not irrational. Kant’s famous statement in the Preface of the *Critique*: “I had to deny *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*” (Kant

7 In this context, the term “reason” (and also “rational”, etc.) is employed in the manner typical of the Kantian systematic context. It is important to distinguish this use of the term from its normative usage, whereby “rational” is defined as that which can be believed on the basis of the sound application of the rational faculty. It is important to bear this ambivalence in mind throughout this contribution in order to avoid any misunderstandings that may arise due to the term’s semantic vagueness. In the first sense, the content of religious faith is not in contradiction with the sphere of reason; however, in the second sense, it is non-rational. For the sake of clarity and consistency with the Kantian framework, it is preferable – in the context of this contribution – to refer the second meaning not to reason, but to the faculty of the determining understanding, which is the faculty of rules in which the foundations of logical thought reside.

1998: 117) – which, of course, for Kant can only acquire its full meaning at the level of practical reason – could be interpreted as meaning that faith is not necessarily outside the sphere of reason, but rather within it. This statement, according to this interpretation, should therefore be read from the fundamental theoretical situation at stake here.

The most noteworthy aspect – yet often overlooked – is that it is precisely the insecure, threatening and somewhat confusing environment outside the island of truth that secures and guarantees possession of this island as the land of true knowledge. In other words, and according to a somewhat paradoxical relationship, it is through its distinction from the surrounding ocean that the land of truth can delineate its boundaries with a certain degree of certainty. How could it establish its borders if not by this negative work of ‘cutting out’, if not by marking an opposition to what it is not, but which nevertheless surrounds it, i.e. the ocean of metaphysics? Indeed, the understanding that

“does not reflect on the sources of its own cognition, may get along very well, but cannot accomplish one thing, namely, determining for itself the boundaries of its use and knowing what may lie within and what without its whole sphere [...]. But if the understanding cannot distinguish whether certain questions lie within its horizon or not, then it is never sure of its claims and its possession, but must always reckon on many embarrassing corrections when it continually oversteps the boundaries of its territory (as is unavoidable) and loses itself in delusion and deceptions” (Kant 1998: 340).

Now, at the end of the Transcendental Analytic, Kant assigns the task of mapping the understanding and tracing its limits to “the deep inquiries that we have undertaken” (Kant 1998: 340), namely those of the Transcendental Analytic itself, in which the understanding and its concepts ordered to scientific use in the strict sense were the explicit object of investigation. However, it should be noted that the act of drawing boundaries to circumscribe a territory is, in itself, the act of separating it from the outside. Consequently, the extent to which this task can be carried out is contingent upon the extent to which the territory in question is defined in opposition to what is external to it. It is for this reason that it is not only permitted, but even necessary, for the philosopher to sail that ocean where reason necessarily leaves the understanding behind in the shallows of that safe island patrolled by Transcendental Analytic. This is appropriate precisely to ascertain “by what title we occupy even this land, and can hold it securely against all hostile claims” (Kant 1998: 339). But this is exactly what Kant undertakes in the Dialectic, where he does not address the understanding and the possibility of its reference to objects of experience, but rather reason in its reference to ‘objects in general’ and therefore independently of experience.

4. The Noumenon as a Boundary Concept

In light of this, the well-known distinction between *phenomenon* and *noumenon* must be considered.⁸ If the phenomenon denotes that which appears within the restricted sphere of the understanding with reference to the conditions of sensible intuition, and is therefore scientifically treatable, the noumenon denotes the purely *thinkable*, that which could not be the object of purely scientific consideration, but can at least in principle be the object of rational thought.

“Nevertheless, if we call certain objects, as appearances, beings of sense (*phaenomena*), because we distinguish the way in which we intuit them from their constitution in itself, then it already follows from our concept that to these we as it were oppose, as objects thought merely through the understanding, either other objects conceived in accordance with the latter constitution, even though we do not intuit it in them, or else other possible things, which are not objects of our senses at all, and call these beings of understanding (*noumena*)” (Kant 1998: 360).

In this context, it is important to differentiate between two interpretations of the concept of the noumenon. In the first sense, the noumenon represents “an object of a non-sensible intuition” that is positively posited as existing in itself. The second meaning is that of the noumenon as “a thing insofar as it is not an object of our sensible intuition, because we abstract from the manner of our intuition of it, then this is a noumenon in the negative sense” (Kant 1998: 360). It is evident that the outcomes of the Kantian critical endeavour result in the dismissal of the noumenon in the positive sense. Nevertheless, the negative sense offers considerable systematic value. In this meaning, the concept of the noumenon is not only *not* contradictory, although it remains *problematic* (i.e. its objective reality cannot be verified, and this because it falls outside the sphere of sensibility and thus of possible experience), but it is even “necessary in order not to extend sensible intuition to things in themselves, and thus to limit the objective validity of sensible cognition” (Kant 1998: 362). Consequently, even if the noumenon (in the negative sense) as a problematic concept does not correspond to any object that can be given in experience, its systematic role is nevertheless indispensable, because it consists in securing “an empty space” (Kant 1998: 365) beyond the realm of possible experience, which only in this way is delimited in its boundaries, in its amplitude and scope. “The concept of a noumenon is therefore merely a *boundary concept*, in order to limit the pretension of sensibility, and therefore only of negative use” (Kant 1998: 362).

But a boundary is always both opening and closing, and depending on the perspective, it delimits a territory and opens up what lies beyond. If the

8 For a critical analysis of the relationship between the noumenon and the phenomenon, which partly diverges from the interpretation presented in this paper, see Allais (2015: 59 ff.).

delimitation of knowledge by the noumenon serves to restrict knowledge to the phenomenal sphere, and thus to set its limits, the same gesture (which is the positive side of this purely negative result) is also the recognition that knowledge, which does not exhaust all that reason can think, must coexist with its 'other'. The operation of 'cutting' certainly produces a 'residue' which, although it cannot be subject to scientific knowledge and therefore does not belong to the land of truth, is not in principle contradictory in itself and therefore empty. On the contrary, it is the necessary by-product of the Kantian enterprise, which already emerges at the end of the Transcendental Analytic and even serves as the systematic 'backdrop' against which the secure domain of science can emerge. Science that is not situated within such a meta-empirical framework would be as implausible as attempting to draw a determinate figure without setting it against a background.

5. A Concise Overview of the Outcomes Attained

The Kantian framework appears to have at least three significant implications for the purposes of this study.

The first consequence is the possibility of a clear distinction between the empirical sphere of scientific knowledge and the sphere of meta-empirical and therefore non-scientific thought, which includes the religious domain. This distinction is based on the transcendental analysis of the structures of knowledge and pure reason.

The second consequence is of greater significance. It demonstrates that the exclusion of the meta-empirical sphere from the realm of scientific knowledge does not imply the recognition of its irrationality. This is because such a sphere is accessible to reason, although not to the restricted realm of the scientific intellect.

The third consequence is that it is precisely this meta-scientific domain that, according to the interpretation presented here, allows the delineation of the scope of empirical-scientific thought, thus assuming a function in relation to it that could perhaps be described as 'foundational'.

Accordingly, the Kantian system does not preclude the possibility of an alternative, non-scientific yet 'metaphysical' perspective on reality. Indeed, it appears to necessitate such a perspective, as previously discussed (though necessarily briefly within the limits of the present contribution).

6. On the Critical Legitimation of the Possibility of Religious Belief

With regard to the narrower determination of this metaphysical view in a religious sense and the belief in a God that is transcendent, not contained in the narrow empirical investigable realm of the objects of possible experience,

it should first of all be noted that this is perfectly legitimate from the point of view of the normative principles and laws of reason. This is because it does not present any formal-analytical contradiction, on the basis of the violation of the principle of non-contradiction. It is evident that the adherence to formal-analytical laws of thought and the principle of non-contradiction represents a necessary condition for the acquisition of genuine knowledges; however, it is not a sufficient one. Therefore, the coherence of our statements concerning the religious sphere does not, in and of itself, guarantee the veracity of these statements; other conditions, in addition to the formal ones, must be met. Nevertheless, it is already a noteworthy accomplishment to acknowledge that the domain of religious belief is, at the very least, not contradictory and not antithetical to reason. This certainly opens up the possibility of faith as a choice that is not irrational and, therefore, not to be equated with mere superstition.

In light of these considerations, it seems pertinent to draw a parallel between the possibility of the existence of God, as an object of religious belief, and the concept of the noumenon, which has already been introduced. As has been previously indicated, the concept of the noumenon provides a philosophical tool to circumscribe the scope of empirical knowledge. The noumena “would then not say anything but that our manner of intuition does not pertain to all things, but only to objects of our senses, consequently that their objective validity is bounded, and room thus remains for some other sort of intuition and therefore also for things as its objects” (Kant 1998: 380). The noumenon is not the correlate of a possible experience; however, it is not itself an indicator of a non-existent object either, because verifying that something does not exist still involves that knowledge of the intellect that is excluded here. This is a fundamental point: the fact that the concept of the noumenon is problematic means that it is “the representation of a thing of which we can say neither that it is possible nor that it is impossible”. “The concept of the noumenon is therefore not the concept of an object, but rather the problem, unavoidably connected with the limitation of our sensibility, of whether there may not be objects entirely exempt from the intuition of our sensibility” (Kant 1998: 380). In consideration of the restricted scope of empirical cognition, and “since sensible intuition does not pertain to all things without distinction room remains for more and other objects; they cannot therefore be absolutely denied” (Kant 1998: 381).

The aforementioned words appear to be unambiguous in their rejection of the peremptory denial of the existence of entities that are inherently beyond the scope of sensory perception. Of course, the demands of the Kantian critical approach mean that religious belief, although its legitimacy has been established, cannot be included in the theoretical part of philosophy, which deals only with objects of possible experience. For Kant, therefore, it will have its systematic place in the realm of pure reason in its *practical* use. It is not possible here to go into the details of the *Critique of Practical Reason* and

the other works of the critical period that deal with this sphere.⁹ A notable illustration of Kant's endorsement of the legitimacy of religious experience, at least in a practical sense, as defined in the strict (and traditional) manner as religious faith, can already be found in the first *Critique*. In the context of an examination of the various means of "[t]aking something to be true" – "having an opinion, knowing, and believing" (Kant 1998: 684) –, the act of believing is presented as a fully legitimate mode in its own right, exhibiting distinctive characteristics. Here, he distinguishes between doctrinal and pragmatic beliefs (Kant 1998: 687). Of course, "Kant's notion of religious belief is not theoretical" (Galbraith 1996: 14), and thus religious faith is to be regarded as a case of pragmatic belief, "one which is achieved on a practical, and ultimately personal basis" (Galbraith 1996, 14). This is based on the fact that the concept of God cannot be proven or disproven from a scientific standpoint. This is because, as is clear from the *Critique of Practical Reason*, God is not an object of theoretical reason; rather, he is a postulate of practical reason, which as such has only subjective validity (Davidovich 1993: 20).

This provides an opportunity to address an ambiguity that may arise from the aforementioned considerations. It is crucial to emphasise that the aim here is not to portray religion as an alternative metaphysical system (rebranded under a different name) through which to reinstate the hypostatisations that Kantian analysis of knowledge has excluded. The objective here is to demonstrate that the assumption of noumenal objects, such as those to which religious faith refers, is a possibility, assuming the validity of the Kantian framework. This is because the result of the latter – as has been demonstrated – is not the exclusion of these hypostatisations, but only the rejection of their treatment as objects of the properly scientific dimension of rationality. This means the exclusion of the claim to introduce them into the 'linguistic game' of science, thus committing a categorical error that will be addressed in the final paragraph. The opening to a dimension of rationality that transcends the scientific intellect, performed through the instrument of noumenon as a negative-problematic concept, does not result in the reintroduction of the objects of metaphysics as objects of possible scientific knowledge. However, it does provide a potential pathway for the legitimisation of religious beliefs, provided that religion is not misunderstood as a purely scientific enterprise or made susceptible to complete explanation. In this sense, the path that Kant himself takes – that of recovering the ideas of God and the immortality of the soul within the framework of practical reason, and that sketched by Kant in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (Kant 1998a) – is undoubtedly consistent with the general structure of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, it does not preclude other paths, such as those associated with a religious faith in the traditional sense. This appears to be a reasonable conclusion to draw from an examination of the general sense of the Kantian perspective.

9 See Kant (2015); (1998a); (1997).

7. On the Irrationality of Denying the Possibility of Religious Belief

One might even posit that, in light of our considerations and the aforementioned remarks concerning the noumenon, any endeavor to deny, in principle, the legitimacy of religious faith – in the name of a purely scientific worldview – is not in accordance with reason in the specific Kantian sense. Such an endeavor may, therefore, be characterized as ‘scientistic’, rather than ‘scientific’.

The distinction between knowing and thinking necessitates the differentiation and compartmentalisation of responsibilities between the scientific study of nature and the metaphysical examination of the world. This is the case in both senses. From the standpoint of reason in its metaempirical use, which seeks to comprehend the totality of reality, there is no contribution that it can make to questions that are the concern of science and which do not involve the inclusion of the particular phenomena under investigation in an ultimate context. Indeed, if this were to occur, it would be as if reason were attempting to lead the scientific intellect beyond its limits, which are those set by experience. Such a result would violate Kant’s architectural division of cognitive faculties, and would therefore be unreasonable from his perspective. Something similar would happen, for example, if one wanted to read the creation narrative in the first book of the *Bible* as if it were a scientific text, the purpose of which would be to give an account – in competition with ordinary science – of the development of the universe and of living beings, etc. (which is clearly not the aim of the author of a text such as “Genesis”).

Conversely, an equally unreasonable and untenable outcome would ensue if the scientific intellect were to attempt to substantiate the fundamental invalidity of any religious perspective on the world through its own methodologies. In this case, the intellect would in fact be exceeding the boundaries of experience. As was the case with religion’s attempt to emulate science in the previous example, the scientific intellect would be assuming a role that it is not equipped to fulfil: that of a faculty capable of resolving metaphysical questions and thus transcending the limits of experience set by the noumenon as a boundary concept. The distinction between metaphysical-religious ‘reasoning’ and scientific understanding is based on the fact that the former is totalising and makes statements that concern the *totality of being as a whole*. This is why it cannot decide anything about particular phenomena, which is the task of science. In contrast, scientific inquiry is always *localised* in scope and does not attempt to make global or totalising statements. Instead, it focuses on specific groups of phenomena within a particular ‘region’ of being, such as physics, mathematics, or sociology. This approach does not address the whole of being, but rather seeks to identify invariants within a specific local group of phenomena in order to establish general laws and enhance our understanding of that particular region of being.

It is clear, then, that if the two perspectives do not exclude each other, it is because they are not even in conflict with each other, in the sense that they are not 'in competition' and do not force us to make a choice, but only to change our perspective on the same reality,¹⁰ depending on whether we look at it from a *totalising* point of view, going from the part to the whole, or, on the contrary, from an *explanatory* point of view, referring to a particular set of phenomena and thus going from the whole to one of its parts. (From this point of view, even *miracles* cannot be rejected, as opposed to the laws of physics, as an inadmissible intrusion of one of these two orders into the other. Indeed, bearing in mind what has been said, it is possible to explain how miracles – for the religious conscience and according to a classical line of Christian thought – do not negate or invalidate the laws of nature, but merely represent the introduction 'from outside' into a particular natural system of further conditions which were not previously present in that system. That science should exclude miracles as contradicting the laws of nature is as unscientific as the assumption underlying this objection, namely that by describing a circumscribed and particular system of phenomena all the conditions that can determine it have been defined once and for all, i.e. that science has a total view of the whole.¹¹)

From the perspective of Kantian thought, it is now more evident why the illegitimacy of a religious view cannot be substantiated from a scientific standpoint. Science, as a discipline, is concerned exclusively with the examination of local aspects of reality that are accessible to experience, such as those situated within the dimensions of space and time. To deny the possibility of an alternative perspective is to transcend this limitation and to propose a thesis – which would not be scientific but rather 'metaphysical' – about the totality of reality. This stance, which may be perceived as tantamount

10 A significant proportion of the criticisms levelled at religion for being incompatible with science originate from the conceptualisation of God in a manner akin to the ancient Greek deities. This conceptualisation portrays God as a being that exists within the natural world and is, therefore, susceptible to empirical investigation, with the apparent absence of any empirical evidence leading to a conclusion similar to that famously articulated by Yuri Gagarin: "I went up to space, but I didn't encounter God". Underlying this is the 'categorical' error of not strictly distinguishing between the empirical and meta-empirical categorical spheres. This fallacy underlies many positions that can be traced back to scientism and atheism (see the first footnote of this paper).

11 For instance, the mathematician John Lennox, in reference to C.S. Lewis, presents a counterargument to the traditional critique of miracles (exemplified by Hume) by asserting that the laws of nature are not to be conceptualised as the laws of a political system like a state, but rather as a description of what occurs 'normally' without causing it. A system within nature is not a closed system; according to Lennox, elements can be introduced from the outside that cause the end result to deviate from the norm without violating the laws of nature. Conversely, given that the laws of nature are inviolable, the occurrence of an anomalous event warrants the conclusion that an external intervention has taken place. This invalidates Hume's contention (Hume 1999: essay X) that an understanding of the laws of nature precludes belief in miracles.

to scientism, appears self-contradictory in that, while purporting to adhere to scientific principles, it employs a methodology that is inherently unscientific. Indeed, the aspiration to validate the illegitimacy, even of a potential religious perspective, is only attainable for the scientist if she transcends the 'local' domain of investigation into a restricted set of phenomena in order to make a pronouncement that pertains to reality in its totality, as a unified entity. The only way to definitively rule out the possibility of something outside of what can be ascertained through scientific experience is to:

- 1) look outside of this experience, which leads the scientist beyond the limits of their scientific work, and
- 2) observe that there is nothing in this 'outside'. This then provides a global thesis about reality as a whole, which offers a definitive picture of the world.

However, reality as a totality, the world as a whole, is not a scientific object. Rather, it is an object of metaphysics, which Kant criticises in the *Transcendental Dialectic*: in attempting to deal with the world as a totality, reason necessarily encounters antinomies.¹² This non-scientific, yet metaphysical, outcome renders any such attempt to impose a scientistic vision contradictory. The paradox, therefore, is that in order to eliminate the legitimacy of any religious or metaphysical vision in the broadest sense, scientific thought would have to adopt a dogmatic, metaphysical or even, in a certain sense, a 'religious' thesis, thereby creating a scenario that is no less problematic than the religion or metaphysics it seeks to eliminate.

This result can be corroborated through an examination of those systems in the history of thought that, in contrast to the Kantian system, do not even allow for the possibility of absolute transcendence.¹³ (However, a detailed

12 The fact that Kant, after narrowly defining the limits of the scientific understanding, nevertheless grants a place – albeit only in the practical part of his philosophy – to meta-empirical objects such as God, is an indication of the need for a non-conflicting categorical distinction between the two spheres, between the empirical and the meta-empirical, which makes it illegitimate to deny the latter on the basis of the former.

13 In contrast, and somewhat surprisingly, the approach taken in this contribution with regard to Kant appears to be, in certain respects, more compatible (notwithstanding the obvious differences) with certain expressions of classical metaphysics. A paradigmatic example is that of St. Thomas Aquinas (for a comparative analysis of Kant and Thomas Aquinas on the subject of religion, see Schilling (1932)). The crux of the matter is that metaphysical and empirical-scientific considerations are not in competition with one another. These two perspectives do not represent mutually exclusive alternatives to one another; rather, they represent two distinct yet equally valid approaches to engaging with the same reality. The Kantian distinction between phenomenon and noumenon appears to be a transcendental version of a point that in St. Thomas is articulated in metaphysical-theological terms. The distinction between the two domains, along with the non-exclusivity of both and the fact that they are not in competition with each other, is guaranteed and founded in the 'ontological difference' between God's mode of being and the mode of being of creatures, as set forth by St. Thomas. The latter are distinguished

analysis of these systems is beyond the scope of this discussion.) This is exemplified by the systems of Spinoza and Hegel, in which any 'beyond' is effectively 'emptied' and all transcendence is reduced to the immanent sphere. It is noteworthy that the feasibility of such a project hinges upon the assumption of significant metaphysical premises and ontological commitments. In the case of Spinoza, this entails the postulation of an absolute substance and the assertion that thought is so pervasive that it encompasses the entirety of reality, leaving no genuine reality beyond itself. In conclusion, however, such assumptions appear as postulates that defy any strictly scientific consideration and can be accepted, so to speak, only through an act of faith.

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by a structural and intrinsic contingency as created entities. This is due to the distinction between *essence* and *existence*, whereby they do not possess in their essence the ground of their existence. Therefore, they could not have existed in the absence of divine creation. Conversely, the essence and existence of God are one and the same (Thomas Aquinas 1976: ch. 4). In the terminology of Aristotelian metaphysics, God can be defined as the 'pure act of being' (Thomas Aquinas 1955: I, ch. 16), and thus can be considered to be his very existence. This establishes an ontological distinction between the world of creatures and that of the creator, indicating that the latter cannot be classified as a created entity that can be empirically verified through scientific investigation. This has an ontological basis, namely in the intrinsic nature of the beings in question (this also has implications for language, which is unable to utilise its terms in relation to the divine in the same univocal manner as it does in relation to creatures, but rather only analogically (Bauerschmidt 2015: 138)). The supposition that, should God exist, he might be apprehended through an experience that is sufficiently adequate to capture him, entails the corollary that, in the absence of such an experience, it must be concluded that God does not exist. This perspective fails to acknowledge the aforementioned ontological distinction, which asserts that the nature of God is fundamentally distinct from that of creatures. While creatures can be known as determined in a certain manner, with a given determinate essence, and with an existence that is contingent and not necessary, God is the very act of being. It thus follows that he cannot be located within the domain of the experience of created beings, where a distinction is drawn between essence and existence. This is not the consequence of the contingent limitations of human cognition; rather, it is the result of a metaphysical necessity. It can therefore be concluded that God's mode of being is not in competition with that of things susceptible to scientific investigation; it is simply distinct because he is not a being in the world, and certainly not a body (Thomas Aquinas 1955: I, ch. 20). Consequently, the dimension of belief in a metaphysical entity cannot be refuted by the observation that no such entity can be found in the empirical world. Rather, the acceptance of the existence of such an entity relies on another perspective on the same world.

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