I. Introduction

The leading topic of Kant’s *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World* (1770) (hereafter *Inaugural Dissertation*) is “the concept [notio] of a world [mundus] in general” (Ak. 2:387).¹ There is, Kant contends, a “two-fold genesis” of this concept. Either it is grasped as the “composition of the whole” through use of an “abstract concept of the intellect [intellectualium],” or it is arrived at through representation “in the concrete by a distinct intuition,” which is carried out by the “sensitive [sensitivam] faculty of cognition” (Ak. 2:387; translation modified).² Accordingly, in

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² Translating “intellectualium” raises a number of theoretical problems. “Understanding,” which is perhaps the most natural translation, risks importing into the *Dissertation* the first Critique distinction between “understanding [Verstand],” and “reason [Vernunft].” While it is true that Kant distinguishes between “understanding” and “reason” in his Logic lectures prior to 1781, the basis for the distinction is wholly logical. In the Blomberg logic, for example, which dates to the early 1770s, Kant uses “understanding” to refer to logically immediate cognition, and reserves “reason” to refer to mediate cognition (Ak. 24:281-282). As *logically* distinct forms of cognition, “understanding” and “reason” do not in the lecture notes and essays from the pre-critical period coincide with Kant’s critical use. Further, in its purity, that is, in its non-reliance
the Dissertation Kant is concerned with the nature and principles of the sensible and intelligible conception of “world,” as they are defined, respectively, through sensitive representation in concreto and by conceptual composition of the whole through abstract concepts of the intellect. Here, in working through some of the details of Kant’s text, I will show the link between the idea of intellectual intuition as a principle of intellectual cognition, and the concept of an intelligible world as a “totality that subsists for itself and whose parts are in reciprocal connection with each other” (Ak. 2:330; emphasis added). Specifically, my interest is in the role the idea of intellectual intuition plays, for Kant, in enabling the pure intellect to grasp in full the concept of the world, and thereby to constitute through its activity a complete science of metaphysics.

Having distinguished between two forms of the concept of the world, Kant refers them back to their corresponding modes of cognition. The sensible concept of the world, which is a matter of subordinating a representation under an intuition, is aligned with the sensible form of cognition; Kant associates the intellectual concept of the world, which is a coordinated concept of a whole, with intellectual cognition. By freeing intelligible from sensible cognition, Kant enables the former to grasp the notion of the world as a reciprocally coordinated whole rather than through conceptual subordination. The coordinated and complete conception of the whole of the world is then the activity as well as the result of a fully intellectual scientific metaphysics. To realize such a metaphysics, as Kant explains in §4 of the Dissertation, the “coalesce[nce] [of the world] into some representational whole [in totum aliquod upon anything from sensible cognition, intellectualium is closer to Kant’s critical sense of “Vernunft”; “Verstand,” by contrast, is in the critical works a form of intellectual cognition that involves a sensible component. In an effort to read the argument of the Dissertation in its own terms, and without appeal – however implicit – to the first Critique, “intellectualium” is here either left untranslated or rendered in English as “intellect.”
In these terms, the aim of the Dissertation is to explain the principled character of the intellectual activity of a complete scientific metaphysics. But, what does it mean for an intellectual activity to be principled if not that it is subject to – or, subordinated under – a higher-order concept? As we will see, what Kant claims to have found in the idea of intellectual intuition is a principle of a complete metaphysics that is coordinated with the intellectual activity of conceiving the whole world. The problem with the idea of intellectual intuition as a “coordinating” principle of a complete metaphysics is that it encloses thought within itself, disconnecting the concept of the world from the substantial reality to which it refers. The scientific completeness that Kant secures for metaphysics in the Dissertation is thus realized by appeal to an intellectual principle that lacks any real reference to the world.

In conclusion, I will show how Kant cannot secure both features of an intellectual metaphysics, namely, its principled scientific completeness and its anti-skeptical certainty without appealing to sensible cognition – without, in short, violating the sensible-intelligible distinction on which he founds the whole project of the Dissertation. Further, to avoid this problem, what is needed – and yet what Kant lacks in the period before the “critical turn” he announces in the 1772 letter to Herz – is an account of a principle that completely coordinates the activity of the intellect while still referring thought to the world. Not yet a transcendental idealist, Kant in the Dissertation did not appreciate how the principles of pure thought could determine conceptually the phenomena of the world as phenomena.

If it is the specific idea of intellectual intuition that Kant appeals to in the Dissertation to constitute a scientific metaphysics, it is an idea, more generally, that functions for Kant as a principle of complete intellectual activity. Though unfit,
ultimately, to enable the pure intellect to exercise itself fully while also securing the reference of that activity to the world as a system of interrelated substances, an idea in the Dissertation nevertheless anticipates in significant ways Kant’s later critical account of the “I think” as the principle of a complete metaphysics of experience. So, it is with an idea, as Kant conceives of it in 1770, that I will be concerned. By taking this focused approach in reading the argument of the Dissertation I hope to cast the metaphysical project of the first Critique in a distinct, and somewhat novel, light.

Contrary to the interpretive tradition that reads the metaphysics of experience on offer in the first sections of the first Critique primarily as a response to skepticism, my present reconstruction of the argument of the Dissertation – and my anticipation of the critical project in that reconstruction – suggests that Kant remains intent in his mature philosophy on the issue of scientific completeness. Moreover, this is as true in the context of the Analytic as it is in the Dialectic. That Kant discusses by name a “science” of metaphysics only in the latter half of the first Critique should not cause us to overlook his interest in completeness in the first half of the book. Instead, we should recall Kant’s appeal to the Aristotelian science of logic in offering a complete tabulation of the pure concepts of the understanding in the Metaphysical Deduction; thus, scientificity and completeness are linked from the very outset of the Critique.

Equally, contrary to the interpretive approach that would read the Dissertation as an early response to Hume, with whom Kant was familiar by some point in the mid-1760s, the present essay focuses, instead, on Kant’s interest in scientific completeness in metaphysics. Thus, Kant’s distinction between

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sensible and intelligible cognition is here read as a means by which the latter is enabled to determine completely the concept of the world; by contrast, a Humean reading of the Dissertation would read this same distinction as a means of enabling the intellect to avoid cognitive “subreption.” Primarily, I advance this reading of the Dissertation based on the preponderance of evidence in the text – evidence that will be presented throughout what follows. But, as a piece of extrinsic support for the present reading of the Dissertation, consider the following from Kant’s letter to Lambert in 1770: “I could summarize the whole science [of metaphysics] as far as its nature, the source of its judgments, and the method with which one can progress in it.”

Thus, in presenting his Dissertation to Lambert Kant emphasizes just the aspect of the argument that I propose to focus upon in the present essay, namely, the whole of the science of metaphysics.

In sum, Kant’s mature critical realization of the possibility of securing metaphysics as a science against skeptical doubt should not obscure his earlier and primary concern with scientific completeness. Rather, Kant’s answer to the threat of skeptical doubt in the first Critique should be read as a correction of the central problem that undermines the argument of the Dissertation: the problem to which I will return in the conclusion of the present essay. While granting the need for the critical turn if Kant is to accomplish the goal of establishing a complete and certain metaphysics, we should not thereby lose the real thread that leads from the Inaugural Dissertation to the first Critique – the thread, namely, of a complete science of metaphysics.

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II. Abstraction and the Dogmatic Use of Given Intellectual Concepts

According to Kant in the Dissertation, Descartes, Leibniz and Wolff each left unrealized the project of reestablishing a scientific metaphysics because they failed to distinguish between intelligible and sensible cognition. As Falkenstein describes the Early Modern rationalist context within which Kant was working, “[a]t least since Descartes […] the spirit of the time had been to unite, not separate, sense and intellect.” Prior to the Dissertation, Kant held to the same Early Modern position. For example, in “The Employment in Natural Philosophy of Metaphysics Combined with Geometry” (1756) (hereafter Physical Monadology), while comparing the “marriage” of metaphysics to geometry to “mat[ing]” griffins and horses, still Kant treats the two as deducible from a single intellectual standpoint (Ak. 1:475). Kant argues that the principles of both internal and external action, that is, the intelligible inner force of bodies and their sensible external impulses, can be deduced from the “fundamental properties of the inner elements of bodies” (Ak. 1:476). The possibility of such a deduction rests on the further assumption of a single monadological determinacy that is, at base, an intellectual “explanation [of] the inner nature of bodies” (Ak. 1:476). Accordingly, Leibniz, Descartes, Wolff – and, Kant before 1770 – treated cognition as a single faculty with, at most, its different aspects being named by “sensitive” and “intelligible.” In turn, this meant that a single principle was treated as

sufficient in governing all possible cognitive operations; whether that principle be purely logical, as in the principle of non-contradiction, or metaphysical, as in the Leibnizian principle of sufficient reason.\(^7\)

The *Inaugural Dissertation* marks a break, for Kant, both from his previously held metaphysical position and from the “single faculty” cognitive theories of Descartes and Leibniz: in the text, Kant treats sensible and intellectual cognition as different in kind rather than as merely different in degree.\(^8\)

While maintaining the Leibnizian and Wolffian view that the focus of metaphysics must be the complete conception of the world, Kant in the *Dissertation* departs from his rationalist predecessors in defining the intellectualism of such a conception in strict distinction from the sensible. By characterizing intellectual cognition in this way, namely, as fully non-sensible, Kant is thereby left without a governing principle. Further, because he distinguishes absolutely between sensible and

\(^7\) We are able to move in this way from a logical principle to a metaphysical principle because of Leibniz’s particular conception of a “ratio,” i.e., a reason or ground. As Christia Mercer explains, “A complete ratio is the sufficient condition for [a situation or state of being]. The notion of a complete ratio is closely linked to that of a complete explanation or account: if r is the complete ratio of [a situation or state of being], then a complete account of r will constitute a complete explanation of [the state of being]” (Christia Mercer, *Leibniz’s Metaphysics: Its Origin and Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 75). The principle governing the “complete account” of a ratio of a situation or state of being is the logical principle of non-contradiction. Hence, the transition, above, from the logical principle of non-contradiction governing “complete explanation” to the metaphysical principle of sufficient reason governing the “completeness” of the situation or state of being.

\(^8\) Despite Falkenstein’s tendency to render as the faculties of intellect and sense what Kant describes as the intellectual and sensible forms of cognition, his further point is good that Kant was influenced by the Scholastic Aristotelian tradition in distinguishing intelligible from sensible cognition – and, this because of the Aristotelianism of the philosophy faculty and curriculum at Königsberg (Falkenstein 170). If we treat Aristotelian *aisthesis* and *nous* as distinct processes by which particularity and universality are related, rather than as separate faculties that operate on differently cognizable objects, then the Aristotelianism of Kant’s intelligible/sensible distinction is further apparent.
intellectual cognition, Kant cannot apply the principle of the former, namely, space as the “first formal principle of the sensible world” (Ak. 2:405), to the activity of the latter. Without such a principle, the scientific completeness of a purely intellectual metaphysics would for Kant be as doubtful as it was for Leibniz and Wolff.

The Kantian principle that would replace logical non-contradiction, which would thereby govern the intellect in its pure non-sensible metaphysical activity, must somehow refer thought to the world. Unlike Leibniz – and Wolff and Baumgarten – for whom the same principle governs thought both in its (unclear) sensible and (clear) intellectual exercise, Kant faces the problem of the principled worldly-reference of pure cognition. So, in the Dissertation a principle of thought that lacked worldly reference would inform only the logical and not the metaphysical activity of the intellect: Lambert writes of this concern about the Dissertation in his 1770 letter to Kant. By supplying the pure intellect with a fitting principle, Kant would thereby solve what he took to be the Early Modern problem of a properly metaphysical, and not merely logical, form of complete intellectual activity.

Accordingly, the aim of the Dissertation is twofold. First, it aims to put forward an intellectual form of cognition free of all sensible influence. Second, the Dissertation names the principle that governs the pure metaphysical activity of the intellect. Kant leaves to the intellect the further task of actually conceiving of the world as a coordinated system of substances. With this division of labor in mind, Kant describes the argument of the Dissertation as a “propaedeutic” to the science of metaphysics.

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A propaedeutic, “teaches the distinction between sensitive cognition and the cognition which derives from the intellect [intellectualium]” (Ak. 2:395). Since metaphysics is concerned with “the use of the pure intellect [usus rerum intellectualium]” (Ak. 2:395), a preparatory distinction must first be made between sensitive and intelligible, or “pure [rerum],” cognition in order to allow the intellect, subsequently, to form the science from its own resources.

These last considerations further signal Kant’s break from the Early Modern rationalist tradition – a break begun in the mid-1760s with, for instance, Kant’s critique of Leibnizian space in “Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Directions in Space” (1768).11 Not only does Kant divide cognition in two, distinguishing its intellectual from its sensible form, he also describes the metaphysical employment of the former in terms of its pure use. It was conventional in the 17th and 18th centuries to make the “rerum intellectualium” central to metaphysics. For example, in Leibniz’s Dissertatio de arte combinatoria (1666) metaphysics is defined as “scientia rerum intellectualium [science of the pure intellect].”12 Similarly, Baumgarten begins his Metaphysica (1739) with the definition, “metaphysics is the science of the first principles of human knowledge.”13 Notably absent from Leibniz and Baumgarten’s respective definitions of metaphysics is Kant’s additional “usus [use].” While traditional in conceiving of metaphysics as a purely intellectual science, Kant is novel in

insisting on the further point that such pure intellectualism be a matter of the *use* of the intellect.

In reading the term “*usus*” in Kant’s definition of metaphysics we do well to note its active inflection. What Leibniz and other Early Modern rationalists lacked, according to Kant, was an *active* conception of metaphysics as a pure intellectual science. From the beginning of the *Dissertation*, Kant’s active conception of metaphysics is apparent: he insists, as we have seen, on the concept of the world as variously *generated*. In defining metaphysics as the *use* of the intellect Kant makes that active conception of the science more explicit. Nevertheless, while interested primarily in the *active* process by which the pure intellect *generates* its concept of the world, Kant still countenances the inactive intuiting of the same concept in the *Dissertation*. Kant includes these latter considerations because of the “propaedeutic” character of the text.

A propaedeutic to the science of metaphysics – of which Kant claims to be offering a “specimen” in the *Dissertation* (Ak. 2:395) – includes both active and inactive derivations of the concept of the world. In order to free the active abstract conceptualization of the world from its inactive concrete representation, a propaedeutic must distinguish the former from the latter. In this, we find an anticipation of Kant’s later critical philosophy. A “critique” in Kant’s mature philosophy is centrally concerned with drawing distinctions and fitting thought within well-defined boundaries. Similarly, the *Dissertation* presents both geneses of the concept of the world in order to distinguish between them to provide the intellect a unique domain of metaphysical contemplation. A science of metaphysics, in contrast to its propaedeutic, would present only the active conception of the world by the intellect in the abstract. Restated in terms of the genetic character of its concepts, metaphysics is the science of the *use* of the abstract concepts or “first principles” (Ac. 2:395)
generated by the intellect. The use to which the intellect puts such concepts is further specified in §5 of the Dissertation as either “real” or “logical” (Ak. 2:393).

The real intellectual use of concepts involves their use, “whether of things or relations,” as those concepts are given (Ak. 2:393). By contrast, the usus logicus of the intellect is when concepts,

[N]o matter whence they are given, are merely subordinated to each other, the lower, namely, to the higher (common characteristic marks), and compared with one another in accordance with the principle of contradiction. (Ak. 2:393)

In §5, the way the intellect realizes a scientific metaphysics is presented as a matter of its real use of “given” concepts; this contrasts with the logical subordination of concepts according to their characteristic marks regardless of their givenness or non-givenness. The “givenness” of concepts involved in the

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14 For this reason, the Inaugural Dissertation differs from another of Kant’s pre-critical works, namely, the New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition (1755) (hereafter the Nova dilucidatio). The earlier work presents a system of metaphysics through appeal to the Leibnizian notion of a force of “physical influx” that binds substances to one another to form the world into a “mutual union of substances [nexus substantiarum mutus]” (Ak. 1:415). By defining this substantial community and identifying the force of physical influx through which it is constituted, Kant in the Nova dilucidatio aims to present in full a system of metaphysics; and, this contrasts with the merely propaedeutic work of the Dissertation in which only the “first principles” of the science of metaphysics are identified. In these terms, then, the task of the present essay is to show how the metaphysics on offer in the Dissertation is complete despite its lack of an account of the force of physical influx by which substances are bound together into a coordinated, worldly whole. Anticipating the first Critique, and moving away from the “dogmatic” metaphysics of the Nova dilucidatio, Kant in the Dissertation secures such completeness by appealing to the modal relation between the possibility of a concept and the necessary condition of actually thinking that concept – a point to which we will return below.
real use of the intellect, Kant continues, stems from “the very nature of the intellect” and “contain[s] no form of sensitive cognition” (Ak. 2:394).

In §6 Kant describes given concepts in the usus realis of the intellect as those “belong[ing] strictly to the intellect [intellect-ualis stricte talia]” (Ak. 2:394). Following Karl Ameriks, we can read the “stric[t]” intellectual givenness of metaphysical concepts in Kant in the historical context of Cartesian and Leibnizian rationalism. Specifically, we can treat Descartes’ particular methodology of philosophical analysis as the key to understanding the “givenness” of intellectual concepts in the Dissertation.

Though Descartes describes his method as “analytical” in the Meditations, he leaves unspecified in just what such analysis consists. In an effort to define Descartes’ method, Jaako Hintikka, for one, compares Cartesian analysis to a similar procedure in ancient Greek geometry. Mathematically, proof by analysis begins from a stipulated conclusion and analyzes the conditions from which that conclusion follows. Accordingly, in the Meditations, the ideas of God and of the nature of the human soul are put forward as stipulated conclusions, and Descartes’ analysis is the process by which the cogito and the criterion of clarity and distinctness are identified as the conditions of those conclusions. By means of his analytic method, Descartes does not overturn the ideas of Scholastic metaphysics. Rather, by analytic means Descartes transforms traditional metaphysical ideas into the conclusions of arguments; he thus confirms the certainty of those ideas by showing the necessary

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conditions from which they follow as conclusions of metaphysical arguments.

Continuing this line of interpretation, Hintikka adds that in ancient Greek mathematics analysis was always paired with synthesis. What this means is that the stipulated conclusion of an analysis, once established as certain in relation to its necessary conditions, becomes a condition for a further conclusion.\(^\text{17}\) If we understand Descartes to be proceeding analytically in this dual sense in the *Meditations*, then we understand that the idea of thinking substance [*res cogitans*] is a condition of thinking [*cogito*], and the latter, synthetically, is the necessary condition of judgment, imagination and the other mental acts Descartes lists generally under the heading of “thought.” In full, Cartesian analyticity involves what Hintikka terms a “convertibility” of analytic concepts into synthetic conditions and vice versa; and, this despite Descartes’ denial of the possibility of a “reciprocal demonstrat[ion]” in the *Rules*.\(^\text{18}\)

Further details of Cartesian analysis aside, the above considerations aid our understanding of the “givenness,” in Kant, of concepts of real intellectual use. Concepts are *given* first in serving as the stipulated conclusions that guide the identification of the necessary conditions for their active conception. In turn, concepts are *given* in serving as the conditions from which further conclusions are synthetically inferred. In sum, given intellectual concepts in the *Dissertation* are those that are analytically and synthetically convertible. In *Reflexion* 3717 from the mid-1760s, Kant makes just this point about analytic-synthetic convertibility: “Besides the principle of sufficient reason, this one also holds good [in metaphysics]: all

\(^\text{17}\) Hintikka 122.
\(^\text{18}\) Hintikka 123.
analysis includes conversely the possibility of a synthesis.\textsuperscript{19} Such conceptual convertibility enables the intellect to be fully active; through such concepts the intellect acts non- or extra-logically, i.e., it is not limited in its use of such concepts to the logic of conceptual subordination. So, we can re-read the difference Kant announces in §5 of the Dissertation between the real and logical use of the intellect as a matter of the complete versus incomplete activity of the pure intellect exercised through analytically convertible given concepts.

However, for the \textit{usus realis} of given concepts to be distinct from their \textit{usus logicus}, Kant still needs to establish the worldly reference of such concepts. The analytic convertibility of given intellectual concepts enables thought to exercise itself in full; yet, without worldly reference, such concepts would leave the extra-logical exercise of the intellect without metaphysical significance. In light of this problem, I propose to read Kant’s comments on the activity of intellectual “abstraction” in §6 as an attempt to secure the metaphysical significance of given concepts while still preserving their pure analytic convertibility.

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To the distinction between the real and logical uses of the intellect, Kant maps, respectively, the distinction between the abstractness of the real use of the intellect, which is said to be a matter of “abstracting [\textit{abstrahens}]” and the abstractness of the logical use of the intellect, which results from thought being “abstracted [\textit{abstractus}]” from the sensitive. The privileged term in this taxonomy is “\textit{abstrahens},” i.e., the active abstraction of thought in the real use of the intellect. Ultimately, because of what he calls the “extreme ambiguity of
the word ‘abstract [abstracti],’” Kant replaces the terminology of “abstraction” with that of “rerum” (Ak. 2:394): the usus realis of the intellect, which involves only what “belongs to the intellect,” is a cognitive operation exercised through pure concepts of the intellect that arise by an active process of abstracting. Despite being supplanted by considerations of purity, Kant’s brief comments on “abstrahens” are telling of his understanding of the intellect’s usus realis in a complete metaphysics.

The terminological distinction Kant tries to maintain in §6 between “abstracting [abstrahens]” and “abstracted [abstractus]” signals his awareness of the above-noted problem, namely, how to forge the metaphysically real reference of thought to the world from nothing but the pure activities of the intellect. Because Kant is convinced in the Dissertation of the possibility of metaphysics and expressly identifies this possibility as an accomplishment of a lone intellectual cognition, it would be antithetical to Kant’s overall project to secure the worldly reference of pure concepts by having them be abstracted from sensible cognition: the contrastive derivation of the former from the latter would undermine Kant’s strict intelligible-sensible distinction. Nevertheless, Kant is drawn to the activity of

\[\text{acquired [aquisiti] concepts. (Ak. 2:395)}\]

The proposal, here, would be to read the “acquired” nature of intellectually abstracted concepts as a specification of their “givenness.” In contrast to intellectual concepts that are of logical use only, and this because of their coincidence with the principle of non-contradiction, which governs thought in general, the “acquired” or “given” character of concepts in the real use of the intellect is a mark of their derivation from the operations of the intellect, i.e., their

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20 In §8, Kant returns to the language of “abstraction” in order to specify that purely intelligible concepts are “abstracted” from the laws dictating the activity of thought:

[T]he concepts met with in metaphysics […] [are] not […] innate concepts but […] [are] abstracted from the laws inherent in the mind (by attending to its actions on the occasion of experience), and therefore [are] acquired [aquisiti] concepts. (Ak. 2:395)
abstracting because of its fit with the argument of the Dissertation as a whole. Let us consider this last point first; below, I will return to the issue of the worldly reference of abstracted intellectual concepts.

In “abstracting,” Kant thinks to have found a way of expressing the givenness of intellectual concepts in terms of their active character and not merely in terms of their analytic, i.e., logical, convertibility. Specifically, intellectual concepts are active because they arise by the equally active intellectual process of abstracting. The Cartesian and Leibnizian error, from Kant’s perspective, of allowing the properly metaphysical activity of the intellect to be exercised on merely logical and thus inactive concepts is solved by those concepts being actively abstrahens. If the concepts employed in the real use of the intellect are generated by the intellect through abstract reflection on its own activity, then there would be nothing inactive to such use: such “abstracted” concepts would enable the intellect to be fully active.

Additionally, abstrahens appeals to Kant because through such an activity intellectual concepts are endowed with an extra-conceptual significance. Concepts that are abstracted from intellectual processes are of a different order of significance than those that are simply employed in such processes: in technical terms, we might think of intellectually abstracted concepts as having meta-discursive or second-order significance. Another way to formulate this point is to treat the extra-significance of abstracted pure concepts as a matter of their referring to the mental processes from which they are derived.21
It is by such means that Kant attempts to secure the metaphysical significance of the intellectual employment of pure concepts, i.e., their real use.

However, Kant faces considerable obstacles in proceeding in this manner. Kant’s appeal to “abstrahens” in §6 threatens either to collapse the logical use/real use distinction established in §5; alternately, Kant’s appeal to “abstrahens” threatens to collapse the intellectual/sensible distinction at the heart of the Dissertation. On the first of these matters: if the given concepts of the real use of the intellect are generated by abstracting from the activities of the intellect, then the real use and logical use of the intellect become essentially the same. Since Kant provides us with no other example of pure intellectual activity than logical inference, it is natural to assume that this is the kind of act from which pure concepts are abstracted. Yet, concepts abstracted from acts of inference would themselves seem to be logical concepts, regardless of their second-order reference to those logical acts. As logically derived, pure concepts would fail to be the stuff of metaphysics.22

have pure concepts of reason which are given a priori […] Where do we get them from? Understanding, in attending to its own procedure on the occasion of experiences, has acquired them for itself” (Ak. 24:452). In his discussion of this and related passages from the Logic lecture, Zammito situates the idea of a procedural acquisition of pure a priori concepts of reason in the historical context defined by Leibniz on the one hand and Locke on the other. Accordingly, Zammito writes, “Kant believed that Leibniz went too far in the direction of substantive innate ideas, whereas Locke remained more cautiously processual in his conception of what was independently given in reason” (John Zammito, Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 274-275).

22 Above, in discussing Descartes’ analytic method and comparing it to the Kantian notion of a “given” intellectual concept, we took care to refer to the aspects of that method as “conditions” and “conclusions,” respectively. Even if the “necessary condition” of a “stipulated conclusion” is something other than the premise of an argument, still this terminological distinction cannot conceal the fact that the analysis from a “conclusion” to its “condition” is nothing more than a logical inference run in reverse.
On the second of the above matters: intellectual “abstrahens” seems dependent upon sensitive “abstractus,” at least insofar as Kant defines the former in contrast to the latter. Abstracting concepts from the activities of the pure intellect repeats the constitutive process by which Kant defines the intellect in abstract distinction to the sensible. I.e., “pure” in the facultative sense of a non-sensible intellect seems to carry over into “pure” as the defining characteristic of concepts of the intellect. In this way, the propaedeutic step of dividing the sensible and the intelligible informs the purportedly metaphysical claim that pure concepts can be generated abstractly from the regular activities of the intellect. The sensible – or, at least, the relation of the intelligible to the sensible – is in this way incorporated into a metaphysics otherwise held by Kant to be purely intellectual.

Were Kant in the Dissertation satisfied with the Leibnizian view that different forms of cognition correspond with different degrees of clarity and unclarity, modeling the process of conceptual abstraction on the propaedeutic abstraction of the intellectual faculty from the sensible faculty would be a viable argumentative strategy. But, to argue for a difference in kind between the intellectual and sensible Kant cannot appeal to the latter, however implicitly, in order to define features of the former; again, this is as true of a propaedeutic to metaphysics as it is of the science itself. What is needed is a way for Kant to express the active character of the given concepts in the usus realis of the intellect without appealing implicitly either to the logical use of concepts or to the non-sensible abstractness of the intellect – that is, without succumbing to either of the two issues raised in the preceding paragraphs. I will approach Kant’s solution to this problem by way of his discussion of the “dogmatic” use of the concepts of the intellect.

As already noted, Kant’s aim throughout the Dissertation is to distinguish between different forms of cognition in order to
establish the possibility of substantive metaphysical claims through the separate exercise of the intellect. Such separate intellectualism is described in §9 as the “dogmatic” use of pure concepts; to define “dogmatism,” Kant distinguishes it from “enclus.” *Enclus,* from the ancient Greek, is a wholly negative process by which pure concepts are used to “keep what is sensibly conceived distinct from *noumena*” (Ak. 2:395). Though pure concepts in their elenctic exercise, “do not advance [the] science [of metaphysics] by the breadth of a fingernail,” their negative role is crucial in preserving metaphysics from the “contagion of errors” (Ak. 2:395).23 Dogmatism, by contrast, is a positive process by which intellectual concepts, “lead to some paradigm, which can only be conceived by the pure intellect and which is a common measure for all other things insofar as they are realities” (Ak. 2:396). In identifying the first principles of pure thought the *Dissertation* is dogmatic. By supplying the intellect with an idea as “first principle,” Kant prompts the intellect to dogmatic exercise. Other misgivings about the argument of the *Dissertation*, aside, it is just such dogmatism that Kant will later reject in the name of a fully critical, i.e., elenctic approach to metaphysics in the first *Critique.*24

23 Kant’s association of Socratic *elenchos* with the “elenctic” use of intellectual concepts, which is itself associated with a negative or critical procedure, shows the influence of Scholastic Aristotelianism on Kant’s understanding of Socratic/Platonic doctrine. Implicitly, Kant identifies Socratic *elenchos* with dialectic, which for Aristotle and the Scholastic Aristotelian tradition involves the specification of indemonstrable principles through a process of logical inference. Identifying the “elenctic” use of concepts of the intellect, as Kant does, with a non-productive or non-real cognitive activity echoes the Scholastic/Aristotelian estimation of Socratic dialectic as incapable of articulating basic scientific principles. Intellectual critique and the intellectual constitution of a complete science of metaphysics are in the *Dissertation* conceived as two separate activities; the Aristotelian/Scholastic reading of Socratic dialectic provides Kant with a framework for articulating this difference.

24 Strictly speaking, the “elenctic” character of Kant’s critical metaphysics includes the positive productivity of a metaphysics that Kant in the *Dissertation*
The paradigm at which thought arrives in its dogmatic use of pure intellectual concepts is, Kant continues, the idea of “noumenal perfection [perfectio, Vollkommenheit].” Such noumenal perfection, whether theoretical in determining being or practical in determining freedom, functions as a paradigmatic standard of completeness. It is in reference to the idea of noumenal perfection that the concept of the world is grasped in its totality; as we will see, it is also in reference to the idea of noumenal perfection that Kant tries to secure the worldly reference of the pure concepts of the intellect without implicit appeal to sensible cognition.

associates with the dogmatic use of the pure concepts of the intellect. The key, for Kant, to realizing the possibility of an “elenctic” dogmatism, i.e., a critical metaphysics, is a reconceptualization of the principles of pure thought. In the first Critique, Kant holds that such principles occasion pure intellectual activity precisely in being “elenctically” delimited from other cognitive activities; in the Dissertation, Kant still treats these aspects of the principles of pure thought as separate matters. Despite certain conceptual shortcomings, “perfection” will be used, throughout, to translate the Latin “perfectio” and German “Vollkommenheit.” As we will see, Kant conceives of noumenal perfectio in terms of the Platonic notion of an “idea.” The import of this association is two-fold. First, Kant is drawn to the Platonic idea because it serves as the standard measure by which being in general is determined. Given that Kant’s focus in the Dissertation is on the intellectual concept of the world as a coordinated whole, the comprehensive scope of a Platonic “idea” suits his general argument. Second, and despite the comprehensiveness of an “idea,” Kant remains dissatisfied with Plato’s understanding of “cognition [notionum]” as it follows from the idea: Kant announces his dissatisfaction with Platonic notionum in distinguishing “ innate concepts [conceptus connati]” from “acquired concepts [conceptus aquisiti]” in §8 of the Dissertation (Ak. 2:395). Kant draws this distinction in order to approve in the former the completeness of the Platonic idea as a “common measure [mensura communis]” of all being, while criticizing Plato in the latter for dissociating an idea from its active acquisition (Ak. 2:395). To the extent that “perfection” captures the sense in which the Platonic idea is the measure by which being in general is determined, it suffices to reflect part of Kant’s intent in appropriating the term from Plato. However, to the extent that “perfection” suggests a fixed, and thus static concept, it insufficiently reflects Kant’s considerations of a principle that governs the active exercise of the intellect; for the same reason, “perfection” also obscures Kant’s implicit criticism of Plato on the grounds of the “acquired” character of an idea.
III. The Principle of Noumenal Perfection and the Possibility of Intellectual Intuition

That Kant is able to cover both theoretical and moral determinacy under the heading of the same idea of noumenal perfection shows his lack in 1770 of the specifically critical manner of distinguishing the speculative and practical employments of reason – and, this despite recognizing a speculative/moral distinction as early as in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics* (1766). Further, Kant at the time of the Dissertation lacks the critical-period means of explaining noumenal perfection as an active accomplishment of pure thought through the process of seeking the unconditioned for every series of conditioned cognition. Instead, Kant casts in the negative the activity by which the idea of noumenal perfection is grasped; such “negativity” is figured as the “limiting” of a maximum standard:

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27 The notion of an “unconditioned” concept or idea is absent from the Dissertation because of the way Kant accounts for a given pure intellectual concept, namely, in terms of its analytic convertibility. As discussed above, such convertibility involves the stipulation of a conclusion, the necessary conditions of which are sought analytically. Therefore, there is no possibility of unconditionedness since all concepts are by analytic definition conditioned by other concepts. It will take the turn from the analytic method of the Dissertation to the synthetic method of the first *Critique* for Kant to strike upon the notion of an “unconditioned” concept. On the idea of the “unconditioned” in Kant’s critical-period metaphysics, see Karl Ameriks, ‘The Critique of Metaphysics: The Structure and Fate of Kant’s Dialectic’. *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*. Ed. P. Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). 299.


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The maximum of perfection \([maximum\ perfectionis]\) is nowadays called the ideal, while for Plato it was called the idea \([\ldots]\) It is the principle of all things that are contained under the general concept of some perfection, in as much as the lesser degree, it is held, can only be determined by limiting the maximum. (Ak. 2:396)

We are now better able to appreciate the significance of Kant’s efforts to clarify the process of conceptual abstraction: the discussion of “\(abstrahens\)” in §6 of the Dissertation sets the stage for his discussion of the two-fold use of intellectual concepts in §9. Concerned as he is with securing the real use of the pure concepts of the intellect – concerned, that is, to promote the dogmatic exercise of the intellect in metaphysics – Kant in §6 grounds the possibility of the \(usus\ realis\) of the intellect in the abstract and active acquisition of its concepts. As noted above, Kant’s reasoning is that if the concepts of the intellect are derived \(from\) an activity of thought, which in §6 is identified as “abstracting,” then it follows that those same concepts will be fit to be used in an activity \(of\) thought, namely, the dogmatic exercise of the intellect. Continuing, the negative character of the process of abstracting corresponds in §9 with the negative process of limiting the idea of noumenal perfection as the measure of the dogmatic use of the intellect – where “dogmatism” is a matter of the intellect grasping the whole of the concept of the world.

This last point concerning the negative processes of abstraction and limitation of the maximum of perfection requires further explanation. Consider, then, Kant’s passing critique of Leibniz in §7. As already noted, Leibniz places sensible and intelligible cognition at opposite ends of a single continuum; thus, they differ from one another \(by\ degree\) rather than \(in\ kind\). Leibniz’s criteria of different cognition are conceptual clarity or opacity: sensible cognition is more opaque
than its intelligible counterpart (Ak. 2:394). In place of Leibniz’s merely “logical distinction,” Kant draws an absolute sensible-intelligible distinction; he does so on the grounds of the distinct “ancestry” of the concepts each employs, respectively.

Every [form of] […] cognitio[n] preserves the sign of its ancestry, so that those belonging to the first group, however distinct they be, are called sensitive because of their origin, while those belonging to the second group continue to belong to the intellect even though they are confused. (Ak. 2:395)

The sensible concept of world, just because it arises through representation in concreto, will bear what Kant calls the “ancestral mark” of being a sensitive concept regardless of how clearly it is conceived. Likewise, the intelligible concept of world is marked by its ancestral origins in abstract conceptuality and remains so even if greatly obscured in metaphysical speculation.28

28 The notion of an “ancestral concept [Stammbegriff]” reappears in the first Critique in the Metaphysical Deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding. Though he borrows the title “category” from Aristotle because his own aim in laying out the basic conceptual architecture of thought is “basically identical” with Aristotle’s efforts in the Categories, Kant criticizes Aristotle for including derivative concepts among those with an “ancestral registry” (A81/B107). The pure concepts of the understanding, then, are “true ancestral concepts,” which are to be kept distinct from “derivative concepts,” i.e., such “predicables” from traditional metaphysics textbooks as “force, action and passion” or “persistence and resistance” (A82/B108). Further, and though he does not carry out this procedure in the first Critique, Kant maintains that one could arrange the traditional predicables as derivative concepts under the categories as ancestral concepts, and thereby realize the “completeness of the system” of metaphysics (A82/B108). In light of our present study of Kant’s pre-critical metaphysics, the suggestion would be to read Kant’s discussion of ancestral concepts and a complete metaphysics of experience in the Analytic of the first Critique as a development of the Dissertation point that concepts come in kinds; further, that it is the work of a propaedeutic metaphysics to discern and catalogue concepts according to their kinds – a critical “first step” that Aristotle omits in his
This notion of “ancestry” in §7 makes explicit what we have already discovered from the opening sections of the Dissertation, namely, Kant’s strategy of establishing the metaphysically real use of the pure intellect by identifying the nonsensible and active givenness of the concepts through which such use occurs. Concepts acquired by an active process of abstracting are fit to be used by an active intellect; or, in the language of “ancestry,” such concepts have the right heritage for metaphysical use. But, this accounts only for the pure intellectualism of a dogmatic metaphysics. What remains to be explained is the completeness of such intellectual activity’s grasp of the notion of the world. Here, too, Kant’s discussion of conceptual ancestry is instructive.

Metaphysical completeness is realized for Kant through the idea of noumenal perfection: the latter is the principle that guides the activity of the pure intellect to completion. Just because it is possible for the intellect to exercise itself in full through given, i.e., analytically convertible, concepts, without a principle to guide that exercise there is nothing to activate the intellect to so act. The idea of noumenal perfection is in this sense the principle of the complete activity of the pure intellect; the idea of noumenal perfection is the necessary condition of the possibility of intellectual completion; finally, the idea is the principle of the possibility of a purely intellectual scientific metaphysics. The idea of noumenal perfection functions in all of these regards because of the ancestral relation in which all other concepts stand to it.

The idea of noumenal perfection is the positive correlate of the negative incompleteness of every other determinate concept. I.e., every concept of the world is incomplete to a determinate degree relative to the full completeness of the idea of noumenal

otherwise “worthy [effort]” to search for metaphysically fundamental concepts (A81/B107).
perfection. As noted above, the idea of noumenal perfection is the basis for all conceptual determinacy, whether moral or theoretical. The relationship between this idea and the pure concepts of the intellect used in metaphysics is formally the same as the “ancestral” relationship between concepts as used and concepts as derived by a process of analytic abstraction for real use. This follows from the intellect acquiring its idea of noumenal perfection by abstracting from the incompleteness of each and any of its particular concepts of the world – this acquisitive process also accounts for the idea’s active character. Thus, the idea of noumenal perfection is the standard of complete conceptual activity relative to which all other conceptual use is by degrees incomplete and inactive. The completeness of the world, which is what the intellect contemplates in its pure metaphysical employment, is then the inverse of the ancestral relation in which every concept stands relative to the idea of noumenal perfection: an inverse relation contained in positive form in the idea as principle of conceptual completeness.

Restated in these more technical terms, the irresolvable problem that Kant faces in the Dissertation is how to render active the negative relation of ancestry in which concepts stand to noumenal perfection without abandoning the worldly reference that defines a metaphysical and not merely logical use of the intellect. The crux of this problem lies between the two characteristic features, for Kant, of a scientific metaphysics: completeness and anti-skeptical certainty. In order to achieve the former, Kant supplies the intellect with the idea of noumenal perfection as principle of complete conceptual determinacy. Further, and in keeping with the active nature of an intellect freed from all sensible inactiveness, Kant renders the idea of noumenal perfection positive by making it the inverse of the negative ancestral relation in which all other concepts stand to that of the complete concept of the world. In short, the idea of

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noumenal perfection is the positive inverse of the negative position that all concepts occupy relative to the complete concept of the world.

By activating, so to speak, the principle of pure intellectualism, Kant realizes one of his designated characteristics of a scientific metaphysics, namely, that it be the complete use of the first principles of thought. Yet, in establishing through the idea of noumenal perfection the active utility of the intellect’s pure concepts, Kant loses the reference of those concepts to the world. What the negativity of ancestry represents in the relation between concepts and the idea of noumenal perfection is the reference of those concepts beyond the intellect. Concepts are “incompletely” determined when they refer to something other than the principle idea of noumenal perfection; concepts are completely determined in being referred to the principle of noumenal perfection. By rendering the relation between particular concepts and the complete grasp of the world positive in the name of an active intellectualism, Kant loses the worldly reference of those concepts and encloses the use of the pure intellect within strictly logical bounds. Once more, Lambert’s initial worries about the pure intellectualism of Kant’s metaphysics in the Dissertation emerge.

What is more, by being activated through the principle of noumenal perfection, an intellectual metaphysics focused on the complete conception of the world faces the threat of skepticism – a threat to which I will return in detail in the conclusion. Presently, let us approach the incoherence of a complete and anti-skeptically certain intellectual metaphysics in the Dissertation by way of Kant’s efforts to activate the principle of noumenal perfection. The key to converting conceptual an-
cestry into active conceptualization lies, for Kant, in the notion of intellectual intuition.\(^{29}\)

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If, as noted above, the noumenal idea of perfection functions as the standard of all conceptual determination through a negative process of limitation (Ak. 2:396),\(^{30}\) it is by means

\(^{29}\) Beyond providing Kant with the means to refer to the idea of noumenal perfection, the appeal to the Platonic notion of “idea” in §9 serves the further end of extracting “idea” from its general – and ambiguous – usage in the early modern philosophical tradition. Consider, for example, the various ways Descartes conceives of an idea in Meditation Three. In its material sense, “idea [cogitatio]” refers to any general operation of the intellect; in its objective sense, “idea” refers to the “thing [res]” represented by an operation of the intellect (Rene Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy. The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume II. Trans. J. Cottingham et. al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). 28). Finally, compare the Meditation Three usage of “idea” with Descartes’ fourth set of replies to Arnauld in which he further distinguishes between a formal and material sense of idea.

Since ideas are forms of a kind, and are not composed of any matter, when we think of them as representing something we are taking them not materially but formally. If, however, we were considering them not as representing this or that but simply as operations of the intellect, then it could be said that we were taking them materially. (Descartes 163)

Accordingly, the material sense of “idea” is here further distinguished between a simple sense of materiality in which it refers to an operation of the intellect and a formal materiality in the specific sense of a representing or exhibiting of a thought in the intellect. Following Descartes, both Locke and Hume refer indiscriminately to the general activity of the intellect, the specific representational activity of the intellect, and what is thereby represented to the intellect all under the moniker of “idea.” Since Kant needs to establish the ancestral relationship between concepts in order to arrive at the idea of noumenal perfection, his appeal to a Platonic sense of “idea” allows him to distinguish between an idea as an object of thought and an idea as the activity (of representation) that occurs in thought.

\(^{30}\) We can read Kant’s discussion of the idea of God as “ens realissimum [most real being]” in the first Critique as a development of the idea of noumenal perfection in the Dissertation.


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of the idea of intellectual intuition that this negative standard is made positive in reference to the concept of the world. Kant explains the idea as a “maximum of perfection” in the following terms:

It is the principle of all things that are contained under the general concept of some perfection, in as much as the lesser degree, it is held, can only be determined by limiting the maximum. (Ak. 2:396)

The idea of noumenal perfection is the standard by which all concepts are determined in their givenness; further, it is the standard of conceptual givenness in the negative, i.e., relative to its own perfection or completeness. It is in this sense that above the relation between intellectual concepts and the idea of noumenal perfection was described as “ancestral,” i.e., intellectual concepts bear within them, in the form of characteristic marks, the degree to which they descend in their givenness from complete conceptualization (of the world) in the idea of noumenal perfection.

As Klaus Reich has shown, Kant’s understanding of Platonic philosophy – the idea of noumenal perfection, included – was distilled through Cicero and the Roman tradition of late an-

Thus all the possibility of things (as regards the synthesis of the manifold of their content) is regarded as derivative, and only that which includes all reality in it is regarded as original. For all negations (which are the sole predicates through which everything else is to be distinguished from the most real being) are mere limitations of a greater and finally of the highest reality. (A578/B606)

However, Kant is quick to clarify the sense in which the ens realissimum functions in this capacity. Beings of lower reality do not partake, to varying degrees, in the reality of the ens realissimum; were this the case, as Kant points out, the most real being would be a “mere aggregate of derivative beings.” Rather, the highest being serves as “ground [Grund, ratio]” by which the various modes of possible being are determined (A579/B607), i.e., as the (real) principle governing the determination of (real) possibility.
For present purposes, this philosophical influence is significant in leading Kant to identify the idea of noumenal perfection as an idea of God (Ak. 2:396). Further, the Platonic-Ciceronian pedigree of Kant’s understanding of an “idea” provides a means of encompassing all concepts within an active idea of noumenal perfection just as, on the Roman understanding of the Platonic idea, all forms are contained within the idea as actively entertained in the divine mind.

An intellectual concept that is referred, metaphysically, to the idea of noumenal perfection is thought as given relative to a principle with which it is correlated, and not relative to a principle under which it is subordinated. In this way, too, a pure intellectual concept can be conceived in its totality in correlation with the absolute standard of perfection or completeness. The question, however, is how Kant can draw upon this ancient philosophical tradition for resources to describe a “coordinating” principle of a complete intellectual metaphysics without betraying his insight into metaphysics being a matter for human cognition? What is needed is a transformed divine intellect; what Kant must proffer is an idea of the divine intellect that operates within the parameters of human cognition.

The implicit appeal in the idea of noumenal perfection to the Romanized Platonic idea of the divine intellect is made explicit in §10 where Kant turns his attention to intellectual intuition.32


32 We can appreciate the implicit construal of intellectual intuition as an intellectual activity once we understand the manner in which Kant understands the Platonic notion of “idea.” As Angelica Nuzzo points out in her essay on Kant’s usage of “idea” in the Inaugural Dissertation, Kant’s conception of Plato is not the “historical Plato” but rather “the image of Plato developed by the later Roman authors.” Quoting Klaus Reich, Nuzzo suggests Kant’s understanding of an idea is best read as “Plato seen through Cicero’s spectacles with Rousseau’s eyes” (Angelica Nuzzo, ‘Idea and Ideal in Kant’s De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis (1770)’. *New Essays on the Precritical Kant*. Ed. T. Rockmore (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2001). 235). According to this
In his appeal to intellectual intuition, Kant again shows his proximity to the rationalist tradition that formed so much of his thought prior to the critical turn. Specifically, in the idea of intellectual intuition Kant tacks his metaphysics close to that of Malebranche for whom the human access to truth necessarily refers to God because knowable phenomena are aspects of divine vision.\(^{33}\)

Yet, to align his metaphysics with Malebranchean rationalism is not, for Kant, to adopt its occasionalism (Ak. 2:410). Rather, Kant substantiates the divinely occasioned relation between the intellect and substantial world by reframing the relationship in modal logical terms: the possibility of a complete conception of the world is conditioned by the necessity of the idea of intellectual intuition. If it is the idea of noumenal perfection as principle of conceptual determination that enables the intellect to grasp, fully, the concept of the world, it is the idea of intellectual intuition that secures the active mode in which the world is so conceived; so much, at least, is the argument of the remainder of the present and subsequent subsection.

As noted from the outset, the focus of the Dissertation as an account of the possibility of a scientific metaphysics is on the concept of the world. The question Kant must answer in the text is how the intellect, free of sensible influence, conceives of the world as a complete coordination of substances. The answer is that the intellect conceptualizes the world relative to the idea of noumenal perfection, i.e., it abstracts from the residual indeterminacy and incompleteness of any of its particular concepts of the world by thinking each of them as a descendent of a perfect

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measure of conceptual determinacy. In this way, the concept of
the world is thought in full; in this way, too, the idea of
noumenal perfection acts as the principle of the complete grasp
of the world. In §20, Kant encapsulates this argument by
describing the world as a plurality of substances the thought of
which is complete and whole in reference to the idea of a
coordinating unity (Ak. 2:408).

The problem with this account of metaphysics is that it casts
the concept of the world in essentially negative and thus
inactive light. To think each and every of its concepts in relation
to the idea of noumenal perfection is to show them, in Kant’s
language of “ancestry,” to be incomplete descendants of a
complete conceptual progenitor. As lacking the completeness
sought after by the intellect in its metaphysical use, no particular
concept spurs the intellect on to complete exercise. Conversely,
if the determinate incompleteness of each concept of the world
is rendered active and thinkable in full by referring it to the idea
of noumenal perfection, then the latter is cast in the negative.
From the perspective of particular concepts of the world, the
idea of noumenal perfection looks like a generically inactive
principle of an active metaphysics exercised through specific-
dally determinate concepts. However it is construed, whether
from principle to determined concepts or vice versa, a complete
metaphysics seems plagued by inactivity; hence, Leibniz’s
elision of the language of “use” from his definition of meta-
physics; hence, too, the appeal of a metaphysics of divine
intellection.

What Kant needs, and what he avails himself of in the idea
of intellectual intuition, is a way to render possible rather than
actual the ancestry that marks the relation between the concept
of the world and the idea of noumenal perfection. Kant rejects
Malebranchean occasionalism on the grounds that it fails to
draw this modal distinction. Instead, if the intellect’s concept of
the world stands in possible rather than actual relation to the
idea of noumenal perfection as the condition of its determinacy, then the negativity and inactivity that marks either the former or the latter is overcome. By such means, both the concept of the world, thought in the mode of possibility, and noumenal perfection, thought in the mode of necessity, together determine an active intellectual metaphysics. Further, in containing within itself both the possibility of the concept of the world and the necessity of the principle (of noumenal perfection), the idea of intellectual intuition lends the concept of the world extra-logical significance – an extra-logical significance that Kant presents in §10 as the real reference of the concept to the substantial unity of the world.

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Kant begins §10 by noting that “[t]here is (for man) no intuition [intuitus] of what belongs to the intellect [intellectualium]” (Ak. 2:396). Kant’s reasoning, which he explains in continuing the section, is that what was previously termed an intellectual concept and is now called a “noumenon,” “cannot be conceived by means of representations drawn from sensations.” The noumenon cannot be conceived by means of sensible representations because “the concept of the intelligible as such is devoid of all that is given in human intuition” (Ak. 2:396). The emphasis in this last passage is on “intuition.” The givenness of pure intellectual concepts or noumena is not something immediately intuited. Rather, as concepts of the intellect, the givenness of noumena must be thought and not intuited. Finally, as features of the pure use of the intellect, the givenness of such concepts cannot be intuited since, as Kant explains, “[t]he intuition, namely, of our mind is always passive” (Ak. 2:396).

While denying unequivocally intellectual intuition to humans, Kant still does not dismiss the idea of intellectual intuition
outright. Rather, Kant alters the Malebranchean notion of divine vision in order to connect intellectual intuition with the idea of noumenal perfection: the latter is not the result of the former, but is instead contained in the former as its necessary condition. Divine intuition is not governed by a principle like that of the idea of noumenal perfection; rather, it just is “the principle of objects.” Consequently, intellectual intuition qua divine is archetypal and for this reason “perfectly intellectual” (Ak. 2:397). As immanently principled, intellectual intuition is pure in just the way the use of the intellect should be in a scientific metaphysics. Further, as self-principled intellectual intuition differs from the receptive givenness of sensible intuition. This lends intellectual intuition an active purity that is consonant with the concepts used in the usus realis of the intellect. Or, to put this last point in more general terms: because intellectual intuition is self-principled in its activity, and independent of the givenness of sensible phenomena, it is the archetype of pure intellectual activity in both its exercise and in its principled character.

How, though, is Kant to employ the idea of intellectual intuition toward the end of realizing a scientific metaphysics without equating human and divine intellect? Again, Kant is as unequivocal in 1770 as he will be throughout the critical period in denying intellectual intuition to humans. To the extent that there is purity in human cognition it is derived: such purity is the result of separating intellectual from sensible cognition. The purity of the divine intellect is absolute: there is no passive sensibility that must first be separated propaedeutically from the as-yet-impure intellect. So, how can the former be compared in any fashion to the latter? Kant answers this question first by translating the traditional notion of “divine intellect” into what he calls “intellectual intuition”; second, Kant treats the idea of intellectual intuition as equivalent to the thought of the
necessary ground of all possible cognition. In what follows, we will take Kant’s two-step modal argument in turn.

When thought in reference to itself the concept of necessity is self-determinately complete; it is in this sense that Kant refers to intellectual intuition as being its own principle. However, when thought in reference to the world, the concept of necessity yields the modal categories of possibility and actuality; and, it is in this sense that the idea of intellectual intuition figures into human cognition despite the latter’s non-divine nature. Thus, humans think the necessary condition of the possibility of the world when it undertakes to grasp the latter concept in its completeness. To think necessity in this fashion is not actually to partake of intellectual intuition, but to employ the idea of it as a necessary condition for the possible conception of the world as a systematic whole.

In this way, Kant is able to incorporate the idea of intellectual intuition into his argument for an intellectual metaphysics without thereby attributing the form of such cognition to humans. Further, Kant solves the above-noted problem of the negativity that seems to characterize the idea of noumenal perfection as the standard measure of all conceptual determinacy. In both cases, the key to these outcomes is Kant’s modal transformation of intellectual intuition. The human intellect can think the idea of intellectual intuition without thereby becoming intellectually intuitive; it does so by thinking necessity as the condition of the possibility of grasping the world as a totality of interrelated phenomena. Similarly, the idea of intellectual intuition activates the otherwise negative relation between any particular concept and the principle of noumenal perfection: it does so as the necessary condition of the relationship between each and every concept and the possibility of complete conceptual determination.

These last formulations recall us to the givenness of pure intellectual concepts, which, above, I detailed in terms borrowed
from Hintikka, namely, “analytic convertibility”: the capacity of
a concept to serve both as a stipulated conclusion and as a
necessary condition of a subsequent conclusion. It is apt in the
present context to be reminded of this earlier discussion. After
all, as Kant explains intellectual intuition in §18 and §19 of the
Dissertation, the stipulated conclusion that the world is possibly
a mundane nexus of substances is conditioned by the idea of
intellectual intuition as an extra-mundane necessity (Ak. 2:407-
408). Once it is hypothetically stipulated that the world is
comprised of reciprocally dependent and interacting substances,
then Kant is able to argue that the extra-mundane necessity that
underlies such an idea is a unity in which the world is conceived
as a complete whole; or, as Kant puts the same point in §20,
“[f]or suppose that they [i.e., the substances which constitute the
world] are caused by a number of necessary beings; the effects,
of which the causes are free from any reciprocal relation, would
not be an interaction” (Ak. 2:408).

Because the principle governing determination of the con-
cept of the world in general is the single idea of noumenal
perfection, and as such, pure and active in its governing the pure
use of the intellect, and because it is in reference to the idea of
intellectual intuition that such a principle is cast in its archetypal
mode, so Kant is able to situate the pure active thought of the
idea of intellectual intuition at the foundation of an intellectual
metaphysics without collapsing the sensible-intellectual distinc-
tion on which such a metaphysics depends. Kant thereby
“intuitively intellectualizes” human cognition, in a sense, by
making the coordinated concept of worldly substances the
conclusion of an analytically convertible inference conditioned
by the idea of intellectual intuition as its necessary ground.
Departing from Malebranche, Kant transforms the “vision” of
God through which humans grasp the world into the modal
relation between possibility and necessity; he does so while still
preserving Malebranche’s basic insight into the active character of the divine comprehension of the whole world.

In turn, the human intellect can convert the concept of the world as a complete nexus of coordinated substances into a premise from which further conclusions can be inferred: this is the work Kant leaves to the intellect as it articulates the elements of an actual scientific metaphysics. The properly metaphysical activity of the intellect, then, is a matter of converting the idea of intellectual intuition as a necessary condition into an actually complete concept of the world – an activity that is not the object of a propaedeutic to metaphysics to canvass. By reversing the order of this inference, the intellect articulates the analytic givenness of its pure concepts into real metaphysical reference to the world. The givenness of really usable pure concepts is through the idea of intellectual intuition transformed into a reference of thought beyond the intellect and to the world. Subsequent metaphysical accomplishments of the intellect, aside, in the propaedeutic Dissertation pure and complete intellectual activity involves moving between mundane possibility and extra-mundane necessity through the analytically convertible idea of intellectual intuition. Here, in technical terms, is the link noted above between analytic convertibility and the givenness of intellectual concepts through which the real use of the latter is established.

It is against this background that we should read the final sentences of both §9 and §10 of the Dissertation. §9 closes on the point that the idea of God is both the “principle of cognizing” as well as the “principle of the coming into being of all perfection whatever” (Ak. 2:396). The idea of God qua intellectual intuition is the idea of noumenal perfection in the above sense, namely, as the idea of the pure activity of thought that acts as the principle of the pure use of the intellect in determining the intelligible concept of world in general. Strained as it may be, if we were to translate “perfectio” as
“completion” rather than “perfection” we could capture in a single term both the completeness realized in the idea of intellectual intuition as the archetypical form of noumenal perfection, and the active character of the idea as given in its pure intellectualism. Signaling this dual sense of “perfectio,” Kant concludes §9 with the claim that the idea of God is the “principle of the coming into being of all perfection” (Ak. 2:396; emphasis added). Similarly, at the close of §10, Kant presents “divine intuition” as the “principle of objects.” What this means is that in contrast to human intuition, which is “governed by a principle,” divine intuition just is the principle of the pure use of the intellect; to the extent that a divine intellect is available to human cognition in the idea of intellectual intuition, so that cognition is coordinated with its principle rather than being subordinated under it.

The important insight of the Dissertation, which Kant carries over into the first Critique, is that a complete science of metaphysics is realized in the mode of possibility through the principled activity of the pure intellect. Moreover, because of the modal relation between necessity and possibility, a scientific metaphysics is realized through the principled use of the intellect wherein the principle is not actually different than the activity itself. Modally, as possible, the principle of the dogmatic use of the intellect differs from the actuality of the thinking. Still, such modal differentiation between a possible principle and an actual activity does not, for Kant, introduce a real difference between the two. In the convertibility of the concept of the possibility of worldly substances and its transcendent necessary condition, Kant in the second half of the Dissertation provides the modal solution to the metaphysical problem of a pure and principled complete intellectual activity.

Where Kant will depart in the first Critique from the Dissertation’s modal solution to the problem of completeness in the science of metaphysics is in locating the necessary-
possibility relation in the transcendental unity of apperception. In place of the idea of intellectual intuition, Kant in the B-edition Transcendental Deduction posits the “I think” as the “principle of the synthetic unity of apperception,” which, equally, is the “supreme principle of all use of the understanding” (B136; emphasis added). What motivates this change, in part, is that if reason is set with the metaphysical task of articulating in full a conception of the world through the idea of intellectual intuition as its guiding coordinating principle, such an idea risks becoming both the principle and the character of the use of reason. No such potential “intuitive intellectualizing” of the activity of reason arises if the latter is principled by the apperceptive “I think” – such apperception being structured by the spatio-temporal character of sensible representation (B138-139).

IV. Skepticism and the Possibility of an Intellectual Metaphysics

Kant draws the activity and structures of logical inference to the foreground of the argument of the first Critique. So, the first chapter of the Transcendental Analytic presents the “clue” to the discovery of the pure concepts of the understanding under the heading of “the logical use of the understanding in general” (A68/B92ff.), and the categories pair one-to-one with the “logical functions of the understanding in judgment” (A79/B106). The emphasis Kant places on the activity of pure thought carries over the focus in the Dissertation on the use of the intellect. What this suggests is that the argument of the first Critique might fruitfully be read in the context of Kant’s reflections on metaphysical completeness and scientificity in the Dissertation; a suggestion borne out by
Kant’s explicit description of the first Critique as concerned with these very matters (Cf. Axiii; Bxxii).

Further, though possibility and necessity are tabulated under the particular heading of “modal” categories in the Analytic, their “dynamical” character figures their central role in the metaphysics of experience that Kant articulates through the table of pure concepts (A83/B109). Generally, the prominence that the notion of a “condition of the possibility [Bedingung der Möglichkeit]” occupies in Kant’s critical philosophy is, then, perhaps best read as a development of his answer to the possibility of a complete science of metaphysics through the modal logic of possibility and necessity; a project whose roots we have located in the idea of intellectual intuition in the Dissertation.34

Leaving aside these and other inroads of the Dissertation into Kant’s critical project – a project of “reading together” the two texts that must acknowledge the real developments in Kant’s thinking between 1772 and 1781 – I would like to make explicit a point left unstated in the above discussion of the idea of intellectual intuition. Just as divine intellect in the Early Modern tradition is, in Kant’s terms, a self-principled mode of cognition, so the idea of intellectual intuition is for human cognition both the principle and the object of its metaphysical activity: a coincidence of principle and act realized by Kant’s appeal to the modal categories of possibility and necessity. By means of the

34 In fact, I am anticipating a basic feature of the argument of the first Critique in oblique fashion. The modality of note in the mature theoretical philosophy is that of necessity. It is in answering the possibility of synthetic judgments a priori that Kant reclaims at the transcendental level a necessity erased from the empirical by Humean skepticism. The intent in drawing out the significance of possibility as a category in the Dissertation is not to dismiss the importance of necessity. Rather, possibility is the modality through which necessity is thought or arrived at by “worldly,” i.e., non-divine cognition. What this suggests is that the “modal” answer Kant gives to the question of metaphysical completeness in the Dissertation might serve as the basis of Kant’s notion of synthetic a priority in the first Critique.
idea of intellectual intuition, Kant in the Dissertation secures the real use of the intellect as a principled – yet, not a principally subordinated – activity. Put otherwise, it is by means of the idea of intellectual intuition that Kant enables the intellect to constitute through its activity a complete scientific grasp of the world as a coordinated system of substances.

We should also note that Kant’s reasons for denying intellectual intuition to humans in the Dissertation is not founded on a particular notion of the subject as it is in the first Critique where the finitude of human cognition is defined, in part, as a matter of the irreducibility of the sensible from the intelligible: concepts, Kant famously explains, are blind without intuitions (A51/B75). Rather, in the Dissertation human cognition is denied intellectual intuition on the grounds that a defining feature of metaphysics for Kant is the givenness of the concepts through which the intellect grasps the totality of the world. There can be no real use of concepts by an intuitive intellect because there is nothing given to such an intellect, i.e., all that is thought, and the way in which it is thought, is immanent to such cognition. In short, there is no problem of metaphysics for an intellectually intuitive cognition because there is no possibility of such a science. Working within the context of Early Modern rationalism, Kant in the Dissertation takes as his starting point these paired issues of the “problem” and “possibility” of a scientific metaphysics. Accordingly, the impossibility of an intellectually intuitive human cognition is a feature of the very way in which Kant approaches the topic of metaphysics.35

35 In Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, Heidegger associates the “problematic” character of metaphysics with what he takes to be the key Kantian – and, distinctly modern – insight of the first Critique, namely, the finitude of human thought. In a manner similar to the present account of the problem and possibility of metaphysics in the Dissertation, Heidegger formulates human finitude in terms of the questionable character of a fundamental ontology for human thinkers. A philosophy that presents an actual and thus non-problematic
What, then, is the givenness of the idea of intellectual intuition for human cognition? Though working, basically, within the rationalist tradition after Descartes, Kant in the Dissertation denies that the idea of intellectual intuition is innate (Ak. 2: 395). However “innateness” is construed in an Early Modern philosophical context, its inactive character conflicts with the active character on which Kant insists for the usus realis of pure metaphysical concepts. The analytic convertibility, noted above, by which the possibility of worldly substances is conditioned by a transcendent necessity establishes the givenness of intellectual concepts as long as the stipulated conclusion of the inference is granted. Once it is stipulated that the world is possibly a totality of correlated substances, it follows that there must be a necessary condition from which that notion of the world follows. In this way, the idea of intellectual intuition is not inactively given as an innate feature of human cognition. Rather, the idea of intellectual intuition is given actively in the modal relationship between possibility and necessity through which human cognition operates in its real use, i.e., in its dogmatic metaphysical exercise.

The problem with answering the question of the givenness of the idea of intellectual intuition in this way is that it opens Kant’s metaphysics to skepticism. Though I have argued throughout that the Dissertation need not be read in reference to Kant’s early encounter with Hume’s An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding (1748), still, one of the desiderata of an intellectual metaphysics in the Dissertation is that it be impervious to skeptical doubt. Recall, in this regard, the two-fold character of a scientific metaphysics as explained in Kant’s

metaphysics, which Heidegger identifies with Hegel, is one that begins from a philosophical standpoint other that human finitude (Heidegger) or the possibility of metaphysics (Kant). Against Hegel, the account of the metaphysics of the Dissertation offered in the present essay treats the modality of possibility as consistent with scientific completeness: a conclusion that follows only if we begin, with Kant, from the starting-point of the problem of metaphysics.
Logic lectures: completeness and anti-skeptical certainty (Ak. 29:765). Similarly, in the Dissertation, Kant defines the concepts and principles of a complete metaphysics as those that are not readily or easily refuted by other schools of philosophical thought (Ak. 2:388; emphasis added). Again, though I have placed my interpretive emphasis on completeness as the defining feature of Kant’s purely intellectual metaphysics in the Dissertation, my aim has not been to obscure – nor, neglect – the further point that for Kant completeness involves imperviousness to skepticism.

So, let me restate this last skeptical concern in terms of the idea of intellectual intuition. The thought of the world as a possible totality of interrelated substances is not analytically contained in the idea of intellectual intuition. If we grant the Kantian metaphysician the hypothesis that the world is so constituted, then the move to a necessary ground of that possibility, and the need for a principled thought-process to that ground, follows (somewhat) unproblematically. But, in the interest of activating through the idea of intellectual intuition the metaphysical grasp of the concept of the world as a necessarily grounded possibility, Kant overlooks the hypothetical character of his modal argument. The skeptic may simply refuse the stipulated conclusion that the world is a possible nexus of substances; alternately, the skeptic can offer a competing theory of the world as, for example, isolated and non-interacting substances.36 What is more, while the stipulation of a possible conclusion suffices in pure logic to allow for the specification of the conditions that confirm that conclusion as necessary, in the metaphysical conception of the world a further condition is needed to secure the real significance of thought – and, the

skeptic can reject Kant’s proffering of the idea of intellectual intuition as that condition on the grounds that it is inaccessible or unthinkable to human cognition.

To the extent that Kant remains an adherent in 1770 to the Leibnizian rationalist tradition, such logical conditionality suffices to account for the givenness of pure intellectual concepts and the idea of intellectual intuition that acts as principle of their active employment. But, the Dissertation is part of a broader departure by Kant over the course of the 1760s and early 1770s from the Leibnizian logico-metaphysical tradition; a departure that continues over the next decade and culminates in the publication of the first Critique. One occasion for this departure is the very matter at which we have arrived, namely, the susceptibility of a purely intellectual scientific metaphysics to skeptical doubt. Without borrowing a form of receptivity from the sensible side of the intelligible-sensible divide that organizes the whole Dissertation, it is impossible for Kant to account for the givenness of intellectual concepts and principles other than on logical grounds – a logical modeling that leaves the resulting metaphysics open to the above-enumerated skeptical challenges.

Without the critical “Copernican” insight that the principles of pure thought can determine objects of possible experience, Kant cannot rest secure in the Dissertation that the analytic givenness of the principle of noumenal perfection suffices in the idea of intellectual intuition to render the use of the latter real and not merely logical. The argument reconstructed above, according to which pure intellectual concepts are endowed with extra-logical significance by being referred to a measure of maximum perfection, suffices only so long as that reference is not activated – or, actualized – in the idea of intellectual intuition. Yet, by his own definition of metaphysics as a pure science of the use of the intellect, Kant must render active all principles associated with the conception of the world. Thus, the relative determinacy of concepts must be actualized by
reference to the idea of intellectual intuition. Completeness through the idea of intellectual intuition thus ends up conflicting with worldly reference as a mark of the incompleteness of all concepts: by securing the former, Kant loses the latter and opens his metaphysics to charges of a pure but unreal intellectualism.

In whatever way we articulate the problem of connecting an intellectual necessity with a non-intellectual contingency, it is this abiding concern with the threat of skepticism that moves Kant in his conception of the givenness of pure concepts toward a kind of passive receptivity. In fact, with a little reflection on the term Kant chooses to describe the principle of metaphysics, namely, intellectual intuition, we already detect an implicit appeal to sensible givenness. After all, the only other feature of Kant’s metaphysics in the Dissertation that is characterized as “intuitive” is receptive sensible cognition (Ak. 2:396). To secure the metaphysics on offer in the Dissertation against skepticism, Kant, then, would have to cross the founding distinction of the whole argument: he would have to borrow receptivity from sensible cognition and build it into an otherwise purely intellectual and wholly active metaphysics. Suffice it to say, to argue in this fashion is to depart fundamentally from the argument of the Dissertation – a departure Kant first announces in his 1772 letter to Herz, and that he realizes, subsequently, in the B-edition Deduction through the idea of an apperceptive principle of complete intellectual use.

However, the failure of the Dissertation remains instructive of how we might read Kant’s metaphysical concerns in the first Critique. As argued from the outset, the tradition of reading the metaphysics of experience of the Analytic primarily as a response to skepticism overlooks a longer intellectual thread that runs through Kant’s philosophical works. In arriving at Transcendental Idealism as a solution to the problem of
skepticism in the period between the Dissertation and the first Critique, Kant was not thereby striking out onto a new philosophical problematic. Rather, in light of the present reconstruction of the Dissertation I would argue that Kant’s critical turn might better be read in the context of an abiding interest in completing metaphysics as a science of the first principles of human cognition: an interest apparent in the B-edition idea of the “I think” as an active and apperceptive principle of a complete metaphysics of experience. In this last concept we can discern resonances, however faint, of the idea of intellectual intuition in the Dissertation. Where, in the earlier principle of a complete metaphysics Kant could not realize completeness and the necessity of thought referring to the world, in the “I think” Kant accomplishes both. Further, with the “I think” Kant strikes, finally, upon a critical solution to the problem of a complete metaphysics left – for lack of the right principle – unresolved in the Dissertation.

Bibliography


