

Notes on Kant

Maine de Biran

NOTE

This translation is based on 1993 critical edition of Maine de Biran's *Œuvres* published under the direction of François Azouvi. Both *Note on Kant's Antinomies* and *Notes on Kant's Philosophy* are included in Tome XI/2, *Commentaires et marginalia : dix-huitième siècle*, edited by Bernard Baertschi, Paris, Vrin, 1993, pp. 127-145 (endnotes pp. 312-318).

Note on Kant's Antinomies is a transcription from a manuscript. Copier's notes have been preserved and are referred to with † or ‡. *Notes on Kant's Philosophy* is based on Tisserand's 1939 edition of Maine de Biran's works, with minor corrections by Baertschi. Biran's original notes are referred to with * or ** and slightly smaller. Baertschi's variation on Tisserand's transcription are referred to with † or ‡, Baertschi's version is in [] and Tisserand's is in *italic* followed by an English translation in (), e.g. you may read in the text “[the]†” and in the footnote “[*la*]. Tisserand: *sa* (its)”. Variations would be inexplicable otherwise.

In both texts, with regard to the editor's notes, we have chosen to maintain the original numbering but converted them from endnotes into footnotes.

Finally, since English translations of the works cited by Baertschi are not available or do not exist at all, we have maintained the Author-*Title* citation style.

Note on Kant's antinomies

“Does to say what something is in itself mean to announce it as something that makes an impression on us? Can whoever experiences for the very first time the shock of an electronic device, hidden from his sight, be supposed to know such a device and then to be able to define it as *the thing that made* him feel that sudden shock? In truth, he might deduce the existence of any cause related to the shock he felt. However hard he can torment his imagination, through his mere impression he will never guess which is the matter or the shape of the device, etc”. Kant.^{†,154}

Since, undoubtedly, the effect has no similarity to the cause, we cannot *guess* what is the cause by experiencing the effect; nevertheless, only the fact that we think [*unreadable*] or better that we believe that there is necessarily a cause is enough for us to have the *idea* of a sensible *quality* which is not the sensation itself nor similar to this latter in any aspect. So, from where does this notion of the existence of the cause of a sensible quality come? Kant does not tell us much more than Condillac on this issue; however, at least he expresses quite well this reality [...] and separated from sensation. “It is *impossible to us* – he writes – to judge the *essence of things in themselves* through the nature of *phenomena*”.^{‡,155} But at least we know that there are things and that they have an *essence* independently of our *mind*; this is enough to shatter the Idealistic and Sceptic doctrines by virtue of the reality of a world made of substances and

[†] Can be read in the margin : p. 12.

[‡] Can be read in the margin : p. 13.

⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ Johannes Kinker, *Essai d'une exposition succincte de la Critique de la Raison Pure*, Amsterdam, Changuion & Den Hengst, 1801, pp. 134-135: “Does to say what something [...] related to the shock he felt, and to vaguely compare it with something else that, earlier, would have had a quite similar effect on him. However hard he can torment his imagination: through the mere impression he has had, will he never guess what is the matter or the shape of this tool, which worked as a vehicle for the electric flow» is what Biran underlines; the reference at page 12 is unexplainable, precisely as those of the following notes.

⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 134. This passage immediately follows that of the last note. This is what Biran underlines.

causes outside us. If indeed we did not know much more than the fact that this *world* really exists and includes things that we should escape or avoid, it would be enough to determine our behaviour and accomplish our destiny. In the darkness we can find our way with confidence, if we already know that there is an obstacle on that side or at that particular place, without knowing the exact nature of such an obstacle.

Although we know bodies only as causes of pleasant or unpleasant sensations, and in general all the objects only as causes of ideas or *notions* – notions that exist only in our mind – however we will organize our actions or coordinate our ideas according to an order determined by the existence of these causes, and precisely in such a way that we can either enjoy their favourable influence or avoid their harmful influence, by foreseeing the action of these causes, whose existence – and nothing more – is certain to us. Since such an incomplete science, or rather this belief or [][†] of science about what *beings* are outside us and independently of our sensations and ideas, provides the suitable guarantee for the [?]duties of morals and religion, as well as for the laws of nature, whereas the philosophy of pure sensation – which founds the reasons for a necessary Scepticism, not only about what an invisible world of substances and causes can be, but rather about the real existence of such a world and whatever may be outside our ideas – destroys for us every reality, universe and God, and breaks our possible links to the things of Earth as well as of Heaven.

Kant distinguishes what he calls *dynamic antinomies* from the *mathematic antinomies*. These latter consist of two theses and two antitheses that are both true, about the *quantity* and the *quality* of the objects that compose the phenomenal world from our point of view. For instance, in these two kinds of antinomies it is also stated: 1st according to quantity, that the world is infinite and limited in time [and] space, i. e. that it has got a beginning and that it is eternal, that it is limitless [? and] that it has got limits; 2nd according to quality, that matter is composed of simple parts or that there is nothing simple in the world and that in this latter everything is infinitely *composed*.¹⁵⁶

These theses are based on the necessity imposed on our mind (as law or form) to complete each retrograde series of conditions; such necessity does

[†] [], expression that undoubtedly belongs to a neglected version.

⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-141

not prove anything concerning what things are in themselves[†].¹⁵⁷ nor outside those purely subjective forms of space and time to which we claim in vain to subject them. From this it follows that, when we discuss the question whether it is finite or infinite in space and time, what we apply to the phenomenal world does not concern at all the *real* world or [*unreadable*], that we should be able [to conceive] beyond these forms of our sensibility, in order to know what it is in itself. And then, if there is no more space nor time, the subject of our discussion clearly vanishes.

† Can be read in the margin : p. 12.

⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150: "This illusion only arises from the fact that we transfer the *idea of absolute totality*, which cannot be valid but for things themselves, to those phenomena that are given to us only in our perception and are considered in a retrograde series, without such a retrogradation taking place outside our perception. We confuse phenomena, or the appearance of things, with the things that appear; and we wrongly consider the form that they take as they appear in the natural conformation of our *sensibility*, without which we could not be aware of phenomena, as the forms proper to things in themselves".

Notes on Kant's Philosophy

Kant applies to the thesis and the antithesis of *modality* the conciliatory arguments that are suitable for the thesis of *relation*. It is necessary to know whether the first of these categories is really different from the second, or whether we have good reason to reduce one to the other, as Spinoza attempted to do by reducing the relation of causality to that of substance; and inversely: "The way in which we admit a necessary and unconditional existence according to the category of modality, as first fundament of all the phenomena, is different from the way in which we conceive a *cause* as free agent, as very first term of a series, according to the category of *relation*. Every time that we deal with a free act, we undoubtedly conceive a being in itself, by which such an act is produced; nevertheless, as a *cause*, such a free being belongs to the series of *sensible* [causes].[†] However, it is quite different in the case of a being that, necessary by itself, is the *absolute* fundament of whatever is conditional and contingent, since, by considering it as such, reason aims less at the *unconditional causality* of the necessary being – which indicates freedom – than at its unconditional existence, as necessary substance containing within itself the reason of its being".¹⁵⁸

I wonder:

1) whether there can exist a fundament of whatever is conditional and contingent other than a cause or a free being by which variable and temporary phenomena are produced.

[†] [causes]. Tisserand: *effets* (effects).

⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ Cf. J. Kinker, *Essai d'une exposition...*, p. 148: "The way in which we admit a necessary and unconditional existence, as first fundament of all the phenomena, is different from the way in which, in the third antinomy, we assumed a cause as free agent, as very first term of a series. Every time that we deal with a free act, we undoubtedly conceive a being in itself, by which such an act is produced: nevertheless, as a *cause*, such a free being belongs to the series of sensible causes. However, it is quite different in the case of a being that, necessary by itself, is the *absolute* fundament of whatever is conditional and contingent: since, by admitting such a being and considering it as such, *reason* aims less at the unconditional causality of the necessary being – which indicates freedom – than at its unconditional existence, *as substance* containing within itself the reason of its being".

2) whether the fact that we cannot conceive a phenomenal result or act, without conceiving a being in itself producing this act, necessarily implies that the relation of *causality* includes the notion of substance, so that, considering a necessary *being* merely as such or abstracted from the relation of causality by which it is determined, reason embraces a pure abstraction providing it with a merely logical reality.

3) and whether, in notions as well as in the primitive fact originating them, existence and causality or the being and the cause are absolutely identical or not, or at least indivisible by thought.

Here we can apply what Kant states in the same passage although with another meaning: reason disunites, as different, conceptions that have necessarily to be considered altogether and draws different conclusions, although, starting from the same principle, they have to share the same aim.¹⁵⁹ Starting from the relationship between two *phenomena* such as the *effort* or the *self* and the muscular sensation, this relationship could not definitely be analysed through its two terms, and it would be definitely impossible to deduce the *notion* of any absolute *existence* or any substance; nevertheless, if we suppose that the felt effort is nothing other than the feeling experienced by the motive force about its own absolute existence and, on the other hand, that the muscular sensation is naturally linked with the extent of one's own body, from which the self differs but cannot be separated, then we would detect either in the primary relation of phenomenal causality or in the primitive fact of consciousness the origin of the two separated notions of passive substance and force.

If we conceived only causes of sensations like the self, we would definitely see the origin of the notion of active substance or of the absolute force; but we could never deduce the notion of material, extended and passive substance.

Kant states: "rejecting the ontological argument for the existence of God, accepted by Descartes, the conception of something can never entail its *real existence*. We cannot conclude on such a reality but through *perception*. The perception of something, along with the conception of it, binds such a conception to existence of that thing. This is the only way in which such a union is possible".¹⁶⁰ Apparently, we cannot better support the Sensualists' doctrine, according to which there is nothing real other than what is sensible or can be perceived by senses, and yet Kant assures us that there are some beings *in themselves*, absolute causes of our phenomena which have nothing phenomenal.

⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 149: "On the contrary, in the last two antinomies, *reason* disunites, as contradictory, two conceptions that are thought to go together, and draws conclusions that it considers contradictory; although indeed no one of them states anything opposed to the content of the other".

⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 165. This is what Biran underlines.

Certainly, only the mere conception of something does not entail its reality, but this conception along with the primitive and *necessary* belief of that thing does entail its existence to such extent that we have no other way of judging reality and distinguishing it from appearance. Undoubtedly, this belief cannot be separated from any perception and would not arise without the latter, and yet it is not bound to perception nor to the perceived phenomenon, but to the *cause* or to the substance which is not perceived: there is nothing that is conceived or believed to exist, whose real existence entails any contradiction with the our notion of reality, or at least we are not able to know that.

Kant inappropriately established a demarcation line between the principles of cognition and those of human morality; he did not understand that the *primitive* will, devoid of any phenomenal or sensible character, was at the same time the principle of science as well as that of morals, and that, without the self, there was nothing independent of the will in our understanding, not even the idea of sensation nor the perception. The philosopher assumes that the self, which perceives itself as noumenon, is outside the relation of causality as well as of substance; hence it is clear that by noumenon he means nothing of what we can conceive or believe, nothing of what we call notion: it is necessary here to analyse a new point of view of Kantianism.

“Man – so they say* – is a being *in itself*, a real thing, a *noumenon*. It is this way of being of his own (we should rather say *this being* of his own)¹⁶¹ that man can immediately perceive in his own intimate *consciousness*. There is no need for intermediary, for senses... The pure and fundamental self is the only noumenon that man is allowed to see bare and unmodified”**

“Whoever reaches the centre of man’s life and feeling, will find such a marvel, such an inner existence that is not cognition but the basis of any cognition and any existence related to outside”.

“Man has two different way of considering himself, namely with the aid of *his own sensibility* and of *his understanding*: then for himself he becomes a *perceived* and *conceived* object, like any other object, a phenomenon, one part like any other of the sensible nature. His *outer* sense (that of intuition) provides extent to the perceptions

* De Villiers, page 364.

** Such a pure self is not only the activity, the present will or the perceived cause of an actual modification [effect]; it is moreover the free activity, the feeling of a *power*, of a virtual force that, being effective in that manner or within the production of that precise mode, has by itself the power to determine itself and to be differently effective; the feeling or the inner apperception of some virtuality is rather the fundament of any notion of absolute reality, of what is beyond phenomena inside as well as outside us.

⁽¹⁶¹⁾ Ch. Villiers, *Philosophie de Kant, ou principes fondamentaux de la philosophie transcendante*, Metz, Collignon, 1801, pp. 364-365 : “He is *in himself*, he is a real thing”. The text in brackets belongs to Biran

that he has of himself; his *inner* sense provides them with succession without extent; so that he acquires a soul and a body”.

“His understanding makes him be a substance, a *cause*, an *effect*, etc... such is the phenomenal man, the man perceived, conceived, known and demonstrated by the cognition of man”.

I have also distinguished the two manners in which man can consider himself, namely as object or phenomenon through the outer sense of intuition and as self subject (still phenomenal, we might say) through the intimate sense of his individuality that is the sense of effort, by which he identifies with a noumenal, independent force, acting on organs that respond to him: this is the origin of the perception of any existence as well as of his understanding itself.

Kant puts the understanding and all the faculties and the forms of cognition outside the intimate sense of individuality and, curiously, he means that the *pure self* immediately perceives his noumenal being, without this immediate inner apperception resulting from the contribution of any of those forms that are supposed to preconstitute its nature or to participate in its essence; is it not like assuming that the soul abstracts the fundament of its being from what precisely constitutes it before any possible experience, and how could we conceive such an abstract being as something other than a pure sign? What! “The soul would be a substance, a cause; it would perceive itself as *pure self*, unconcerned by whatever it is, whatever it includes, given that it is not *substance* nor *cause*, in other words it is devoid of any attribute, of any law of its own nature”.¹⁶²

The explanation provided then by the author about this way of considering or formulating the *pure self* destroys exactly such a point of view. The author

⁽¹⁶²⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 365-366: “Whoever reaches this centre will find such a marvel, such an inner existence that is not cognition but the basis of any cognition and any existence that is related for us to outside [...] Consequently there are two different ways by which man consider himself. 1st Either he observes himself mediately and through the intervention of his own cognition; he considers himself with the aid of his own sensibility and of his understanding, and then for himself he becomes a *perceived* and *conceived* object, like any other, a phenomenon, one part like any other of the visible nature. His *outer* sense provides extent to the perceptions that he has of himself; his *inner* sense provides them with succession without extent; then he acquires a soul and a body. His understanding makes him be a *substance*, a *cause*, an *effect*, etc... This is the resulting phenomenal man, all his acts are part of the phenomenal world and, as such, they are subject to the same laws, to the same mechanism of *causality*, of *necessity*, etc... Such is the man *perceived*, *conceived*, *known* and *demonstrated* by the cognition of man. 2nd Or he observes himself immediately and through the fundamental perception of the self, by withdrawing his consciousness into his own consciousness; then he realises what he is in himself, as noumenon, as *object-subject*. What is revealed in himself, in such an intimate centre of his being, is independent from *space* and *time*, does not have anything in common with any *place* nor any particular *moment*; it is no longer *substance*, nor *accident*, nor *cause*, nor *effect*, in other words it shows to be free of any cognitive form, that is, from all the necessary laws of nature”.

says: "I am an acting being: hence an order of realities proceeding from the self, i.e. whose source and principle is the self. The sum of my actions and that of the acts of my will, by which they are determined, constitute a system of things, modes and facts, determined and created by *my self alone*. I am given the objects of my cognition: they reach me without any possibility for me to reject them (this is not exactly true, there is an activity on which the cognition depends). I cannot create new objects by myself. On the contrary, I produce, I can change the results of my activity; their reality proceeds only from myself; such reality arises from the centre of my being, it is precisely the same as that of my intimate feeling; whereas the reality that I ascribe to things arises from outside and then reaches the centre of my being; my self is not enough to produce it, *my self* is necessary as well as the outer impressions that I receive from things. My actions as well as my will by which they are determined are precisely what assures me of the reality of my being... I *act* and I *want*, this is actually what I consider more real than whatever I can know and demonstrate outside me".¹⁶³

From this it follows that the inner immediate apperception of the *pure self* is nothing other than the apperception of a will or a primitive act; the will and the act can be observed and perceived only within the primary relationship of cause and effect, Causality, the primary and universal law of the subjective and objective *knowledge*, is thus essentially contained by this primary point of view of the consciousness, within which man observes and considers himself as *an individual being in itself*, independently from anything else and any external impression. The whole system of our cognition is then based on this primitive fact, and Kant did not have to nor could separate them, isolating the intellectual from the moral system, since they share the same origin and none of them can be conceived without the other. "What is revealed in this intimate self who wants and acts? What do I discover in it? I discover that the *intimate self* and its faculty of *will* are not at all subject to the laws of the faculty of knowledge,

⁽¹⁶³⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 367-369: "I am then an *acting* being. Hence an order of realities proceeding from the self [...] The sum of my actions and that of the acts of my will, by which they are determined, constitute a system of things determined and created by *my self*. [...] On the contrary, I produce, I can change the acts of my activity, if I wanted to; their reality proceeding from *my self* is then even more effective to me, it is rather my reality than the reality of things. It arises from the centre of my being, it is precisely the same as the fundamental reality of my intimate feeling: whereas, on the contrary, the reality that I ascribe to things arises from outside and then reaches the centre of my being [...] my self alone is not enough to produce it, but it needs *my self* as well as the outer impressions that I receive about things [...] My actions as well as my will by which they are led are precisely what assures me that the fundamental feeling of the *self* is not at all an illusion; their reality is what guarantees its reality. I *act* and I *want*, this is actually more real than whatever I can know and demonstrate outside me".

that my independent and spontaneous will is a principle operating by itself".¹⁶⁴

No, undoubtedly the self and the will are not subject to the laws of the faculty of knowledge, but it is still necessary to understand whether these latter are subject to the former, so that there would be no possible knowledge without the self, the activity, the will; because from this it would then follow not that the activity of will constitutes the cognition as a whole, nor that it creates all our knowledge as it creates our actions, but that it is their primary, necessary condition, since it is precisely what constitutes the knowing subject – insofar as this latter acts and wants – as well as whatever belongs to the subject, so that it is inseparable from knowledge.

"Only the intimate consciousness of *my self* connects me with *something in itself*, with the only thing in itself that I can grasp and comprehend".¹⁶⁵ This is exactly the contentious point in the science of principles; but let us concede this. It would follow that precisely within this intimate consciousness or *self*, which serves as fundament of all the notions, we can have things in *themselves* or beings that are *causes* of the phenomena, although they are not phenomena; this shows more and more the subordination of the laws of knowledge with respect to the primitive fact that constitutes the self.

Kant's philosophy creates a gap between knowledge and the reality of things,* between the apperception of the self, the only noumenon that can be known, and all the external existing things towards which we are necessarily sceptical. The self is neither in time nor out of time; it is its first ring.

It is not the primitive fact that provides the *pure self* noumenon, but the reflection on this matter, the consciousness withdrawing into itself; I want to underline here that it is about the consciousness of a virtual force, of an energy free to operate differently.** The soul observes itself as it is, without observing all that it is, in other words all that it can do as a force; since, if it could, it would know the infinite.¹⁶⁶

"It is something in itself, a noumenon that manifests itself to man. It is precisely him; he immediately observes himself through the intimate feeling of his

* I tried to fill this gap.

** 8th January 1816, after a conversation with M. Ampère.

⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 370: "What is revealed first of all in this intimate *self* who wants and acts? What do I discover in this *volition*? I discover that the *intimate self* and its faculty of *will* are not at all subject to [...].

⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 371: "The intimate consciousness of my self connects me with *something in itself*, with the only thing *in itself* that I can comprehend".

⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ G.W. Leibniz, *Nouveaux Essais*, livre III, ch. 3, § 6 ; éd. Raspe, p. 247 ; éd. Gerhardt, t. V, p. 268: "The most considerable aspect of this is that *individuality* embraces the infinite, and only he who is able to understand this can reach the knowledge of the principle of individuation of this or that thing; which follows from the influence (if correctly understood) of all the things of the universe on each other".

own consciousness, as an active being (I say: free being), he observes his being in a way completely different from the way in which he observes the external objects, without the intervention of his sensibility, his understanding, his cognition in general, that is to say the laws of space and time, the categories".¹⁶⁷

It is necessary that the primitive self observes itself without the intervention of these faculties or laws of cognition, since this immediate apperception is precisely the origin or the principle on which these laws depend and because it does not depend on them; outside the self, there is no time; therefore the primitive self is outside the law of time; it is *cause*, therefore its apperception does not depend on the law of causality, which is rather founded on the former.

We could have the feeling of cause, of actual force, within the primitive relationship of the wished effort with its actual result; and such a feeling would constitute [the]† simple *personality*, a feeling of the *self* different from sensible modification as well as from any other existence... The animals higher on the scale [of animality] can have this kind of *personality*. However this is not man's personality which is inherent in the feeling not only of an actual force producing such a determined mode, but rather and especially in the feeling of a power of action or of a virtual force that might exert it in a very different way.

Kant says: "By intellectual being we should mean such a thing that we cannot observe by ourselves, although we receive *some impression* of it: then we conceive it only *negatively*; we do not say what it is, but what it is not, and we merely provide as knowledge the fact that an intellectual being is not a phenomenon".¹⁶⁸ We should agree on the value of words such as *observing*, *conceiving*: when we say that an intellectual being (a thing or a cause of which we receive impressions) cannot be observed by us, we ordinarily mean that such being-*cause* is not liable to being felt nor imagined nor conceived with the aid of the outer senses, such as sight and touch, to which we tend to refer all our ideas, since they are actually more predominant than any other sense within human organisation; but, given the fact that the being, the force or the *cause*, whose impression I feel, is not liable to being imagined nor conceived as a visible or tangible object, this does not really imply that it cannot be observed or conceived with the aid of a proper sense, the same sense on which both the intimate feeling of our identical personal individuality and the feeling of our activity depend. This is precisely how we conceive whatever we define as *force*, a producing or efficient cause, and within these conceptions

† [*la*]. Tisserand: *sa* (its).

⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ Villiers, *Philosophie de Kant...*, p. 404: "[...] of his cognition, in general, therefore without any action of the laws of space, time, by categories, or by the laws of nature". The text in bracket belongs to Biran.

⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ Kinker, *Essai d'une exposition...*, p. 81. Biran underlines differently.

or notions the sense of our activity can work as the sense of sight or of touch work with respect to the ideas related to external objects.

Therefore we are not driven to conceive the intellectual beings [under][†] *negative* ideas, and apart from our knowledge of the fact that they are not phenomena, moreover we are definitely sure that they are *permanent* real beings, active forces like *our self*.

From Kant's point of view, in order to conceive something as *it is in itself*, it would be necessary that we should not observe it in any possible way. Does saying that something is perceived according to its relationship with a mind, or a particular sense suitable to its case, necessarily imply that it is not represented as it is or according to what it is in itself? Given the fact that the one and the same object can be simultaneously represented in so many different ways as those related to different intelligence and organisation, we can definitely deduce that a finite intelligence or an organized thinking being cannot have but incomplete and quite inappropriate knowledge of each object of its conceptions, but we cannot deduce that the partial point of view from which it grasps the object cannot be considered as part of the real essence of that object.¹⁶⁹

It is especially clear that such an incomplete perspective on the perceived object, even if it were illusory, does not modify at all the truth nor the reality of the intellectual notions of beings, substances, causes or acting forces.

Indeed, shall we need to *know* what the beings whose notions we possess are *in themselves*, in order to be sure that they actually are and exist? And how could we argue that we are not able to have any representation nor to conceive through our imagination the things – which by their notion are not liable to being imagined – in order to disprove the absolute truth or the real existence of the things whose notions or primitive and necessary beliefs we possess? What else does to be in itself and to conceive *something in itself* mean, and what is the pattern of such conception? The *acting* force that constitutes *the self*; the only one that can be said to exist in itself, to be observed, and precisely as it is in itself. Therefore, by analogy, we could say that, in order to conceive *something in itself*, it would be necessary to be exactly that thing or to be identified with it. However, is there no way of conceiving or grasping the reality of things which is as certain and infallible as our way of observing innerly, or from inside to

[†] [sous]. Tisserand: *sans* (without).

⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ Ancillon, *Mélanges de littérature et de philosophie*, Paris, Nicoll & Schoell, 1809, t. I, pp. 58-59: "Each intelligence grasps relative truths ; but, since any relationship between two beings is dependent on their nature, so that it could not exist between two other beings, the relative truths constituting the part of each intelligence are definitely truths [...] To know the beings is not to have a representation of them as they would be, if they were not represented anywhere and by anybody"); and later he adds: « 'être représenté' pour un objet ne signifie pas 'ne pas être représenté tel qu'il est' » ("as for an object 'being represented' does not mean 'not being represented as it is'").

inside,¹⁷⁰ the personal force of the will and of the self, such as it is in itself, although these two types of conception or apperception are essentially different from each other?

Since the force that wants and acts in ourselves is essentially simple, the primitive notion by which we conceive it – or rather the feeling through which it observes and manifests itself even to itself – will definitely contain the complete essence of that force; it is a notion necessarily suitable to its object; it is not liable to upper or lower levels of perfection. Therefore since all the notions and forces that we conceive as we conceive our self are simple, the notions that we possess of them, as real beings that provide some determined modification to us or to our sensibility, are necessarily suitable as well and they cannot nor have to contain anything more than the idea of the activity taken in ourselves, through which the cause produces its effect. What else could we claim? Would we have a representation of this force through our imagination or through any outer sense of ours, from which it does not arise at all, precisely as smells do not come from our sense of sight? We would claim something ridiculous and contradictory... Would we rather identify with the outer force, in order to know what it is in itself? However, if such an identification is impossible and opposed to the nature of things, it is still true that, by conceiving the forces and the efficient causes like the *self*, we know about them whatever can be known and even whatever they are, only because we possess simple, necessary notions of them, notions that we could consider identical to those we create of our own being when, by abstracting from the current feeling of a determined effort, we conceive the energy or the power of reiterating the same effort or of starting any new effort; therefore, as we conceive our own causality or our motive force in itself, beyond the feeling of the individual *self*, so do we conceive, according to the same pattern, the simple forces producing the outer phenomena, precisely as these forces are, beyond the represented phenomena.

In this sense, Kant is wrong when he denies that the understanding has the power to conceive something beyond the *sensible* objects, that is outside the qualities constituting these sensible object, and when he states that the things in themselves are unknown to the understanding.

“It is impossible to prove the existence of the things to which the *ideas of reason* (notions) refer. Indeed, since these ideas (soul, universe, God), that are the causes of phenomena, as well as all the phenomena are primary conditions, principles which are so much *higher* than the others that they cannot depend on any other condition,

⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ Lignac, J.A. Lelarge de, *Le Témoignage du sens intime et de l'expérience*, 3 voll., Auxerre, Fournier, 1760, t. I, pp. 103-104: “Our soul sees itself, so to speak, from inside to inside, only the soul can see in this way”.

it is then impossible that *reason* can acquire them through deduction or legitimate conclusion".¹⁷¹

From this we draw the fundamental problem in the first principle proposed by Descartes, who claimed that it was possible to deduce through reason the absolute being of the soul, or the idea of an unconditional cause of the thought as a fact and of the existence of the individual self. In fact, Descartes did not realize that, if the *absolute* was not given immediately within the primary relation that constitutes the primitive fact of consciousness, then the mind could not come to the conception of this absolute through any reasoning or artificial logical procedure, and it would feel itself thinking for all eternity, without having the slightest notion of a *thinking* thing nor of a substance, with respect to which the actual and positive feeling of the existence of the self is an attribute or a predicate.

"Although they cannot be given by experience nor apodictically proved nor demonstrated, still the three unconditional [notions] to which reason comes are not a chimera; on the contrary, they are data stemming essentially from the *natural* disposition or the invariable form of our reason, and if we cannot realise them or we cannot rigorously demonstrate the existence of the objects, precisely as reason considers them through its ideas, because there are no given principles from which they might be *derived*, nevertheless this impossibility is only subjective and depends on the laws of our cognition; so, in every epoch all the philosophers attempted to provide a demonstration of the reality of ideas or notions at issue".¹⁷²

The notions or ideas of reason brings with it reality or they are provided with an essential character of *truth* that, by excluding any possible doubt, apparently excludes also the search or need for demonstration; and precisely because they wanted to prove the reality of what we primitively and necessarily felt or knew as real, philosophers failed and went around in circles of paralo-

⁽¹⁷¹⁾ Kinker, *Essai d'une exposition...*, pp. 86-87: "It is impossible to prove the existence of the things to which these ideas refer. [...] Now, since these *ideas* are primary conditions, principles which are so *higher* than any other principle that they do not depend on any other condition, it is then impossible that *reason* can acquire them through deduction or legitimate conclusion".

⁽¹⁷²⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90: "The three unconditional notions to which *reason* comes and that it needs and is compelled by nature to embrace, in order to achieve the knowledge of the understanding, they cannot be given within experience nor – as we have said above – be strictly proved, nor, in Kant's words, apodictically demonstrated. This notwithstanding, they are not at all a chimera; and the ideas stemming from them cannot be reduced to phantoms of imagination. On the contrary, they are precisely data stemming essentially from the *natural* disposition or the invariable form of our reason; and if we cannot realise them, this impossibility is only *subjective* and must ascribed to the strict limits that confine our cognition within the actual limits of our existence [...] In every epoch all the philosophers attempted to provide this demonstration".

gisms and mistakes.

“From the *transcendental conception* or *notion* of us as thinking-being, that does not contain anything *multiple*, we can draw the absolute unity or simplicity of the *being* in itself or of the soul, about which we cannot obtain any conception”.¹⁷³

From the *one* feeling of the self we immediately derive the notion of motive force or cause, whose conception is definitely clear and appropriate, since imagination does not intervene.

“The conception of our soul or of the *thinking* self, the conception of the *universe* as well as that of *God*, being all derived from the three forms of our judgement, have become three different branches of a science called *metaphysics* (that is only the necessary application of our reason), namely the science of the soul, psychology, the science of the universe, *cosmology*, and the science of God, theology”.

“Each of these so-called sciences appropriates some propositions as well as the conclusions drawn from its assumptions; however, the assumptions to which these conclusions refer belong to the essence of our cognition and to the subjective use, precisely as the forms of sensibility and understanding”.

“From this it follows that these conclusions, insofar as they aim to establish the objective reality of the metaphysical ideas, are nothing other than games of reasoning and sophisms of that reasoning whose illusion rules the best minds”.¹⁷⁴

⁽¹⁷³⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 92: “From the *transcendental* conception, higher than any other experience, of our thinking-being, that does not contain anything multiple, we draw the absolute unity or simplicity of this being by itself, about which we cannot obtain any conception”.

⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-92: “The conception of our soul or of the *thinking* self – the conception of the *universe* – as well as that of the being of beings, of the Divinity, being all derived from the three forms of our judgement and from the consequences drawn by our *reason*, have become matter for the research of this *reason*, three different branches of a science called *metaphysics*, namely called *psychology*, the science of the soul, *cosmology*, the science of the universe, and *theology*, the science or knowledge of God. Each of these so-called sciences appropriates some propositions as well as the conclusions drawn from its assumptions. However, since these assumptions are transcendental propositions as well, it is clear that, when we claim to draw conclusions from them, we only conclude from something unknown – because it goes over the limits of our experience – something else, about which we do not possess any conception; even though, being charmed by appearances despite ourselves, we ascribe an objective reality to it. And then, with respect to their results, these conclusions should rather be considered as mind games than as conclusions of *reasoning*; although, considering their origin, they should definitely be granted with the last definition. In fact they are not merely due to fiction nor are they contingent within us; on the contrary, their source lies precisely in our *reason*, so that they necessarily result from its nature or from the properties typical of this faculty in and by us: whereas the ideas to which they refer belong to the essence of our cognition and to its subjective use, precisely as the forms of our *sensibility* and *understanding*. However, since these conclusions focus on something higher than this merely subjective use, insofar as they aim to establish the objective reality of the metaphysical *ideas*, they are nothing other than games

Since the notions or the metaphysical idea bring naturally and according to the laws of our mind the absolute reality of their objects, it is consequently clear that we cannot nor must we try to establish it through any reasoning, and that such a reality cannot be legitimately concluded from any reasoning; but the fact that the reality of notions is a primary fact stemming from the subjective laws of our understanding does not imply that this reality is provided with any objective value. The fact that we are forced by the original and natural constitution of our mind to believe that certain things really are and do really exist in and by them[selves] independently of us: this fact does not imply that these things are not at all as we think of them. On the contrary, by applying our reason to these necessary beliefs, we see that even the subjective necessity is a legitimate evidence about the reality of the object thought or conceived as real; in fact, how could we suppose that we are in an eternal illusion, and whence could we draw the idea of a reality opposed to appearance, of a truth opposed to illusion and mistake, if what we believe and think to be real and true was necessarily illusory and devoid of any objective reality, only because we believe and think it in accordance with the laws of our mind?

Whatever we may do, we will only be able to conceive [these][†] things within those relations given by the nature of these things, once they are combined with the nature of our own mind and its faculties; and, since it is necessary that these faculties intervene somehow, in order for a thing to be known or conceived, how could we induce that knowledge is subjective at all or that there is nothing in the objects other than what we put into them, and how could we avoid that our way of conceiving them may be affected by what they actually are in themselves?[‡] What is an absolute reality in itself that stops being reality and becomes a shadow, a vain appearance, as soon as whatever intelligence (were it even the Supreme intelligence) gets in contact with it? As the image of Eurydice whom Orpheus' glance is enough to push back to the land of shadows. How should we understand such a reality and how could mind have an hold on it, if it has to annihilate itself in order to conceive something *as it is*?

All the objections raised by the Kantian school about the absolute reality as opposed to the forms of our mind – which are supposed to have no relationship with things *as they are* – focus on the way of conceiving the principle of causality, that is on the question whether this principle really has a mere subjective value or it necessarily brings also an *objective* reality.

† [*Les*]. Tisserand: *des* (some).

‡ Tisserand adds a missing passage whose following part is also missing: “when I am asked what object are in themselves without the intervention of our mind”.

of our reasoning, sophisms of the pure reason whose illusion can hardly be avoided by the most enlightened minds”.

Since the feeling of the self is identical to that of the efficient cause that gives rise to movement and is like a permanent power of acting, although it does not exert any determined action, then it is necessary to understand whether this force or power of acting – that cannot be separated from the existence of the self – has a mere subjective reality as the felt actual self or whether it has also an *objective* reality, considered as an absolute force or energy that conceives itself and by itself as an absolute, permanent, invariable one, while its modes of activity follow each other and vary, or as possibly operating in a way completely other than its actual determination; in fact, if, when the self acts, this latter is conscious of its power of acting otherwise, then precisely this consciousness of a virtual energy or of an unexploited power embraces a *reality* higher than the phenomenon, in other words, a force or a cause in itself different from the mode of the actual and determined activity of this force. Moreover, when I feel an affection as effect of a cause or a force other than *my self*, I have a notion or conception of things that is clearly other than the sensation or the transitory phenomenon.

Should we state that such a notion considered either as primitive or as a quick induction based on the fact of consciousness, derived from a law of our mind, has a mere subjective value? It will be necessary to show that the notion based on the laws of our mind is incompatible with the objective reality of the thing to which that notion refers, or that it is impossible to achieve a perfect *concordance* between what is really in itself and what our mind conceives and believes as real in accordance with its constitution; it will be necessary to show that, given that, by feeling a passive impression, my own nature as an intelligent being makes me necessarily conceive a *cause* or real force existing outside me and producing that impression, then it follows that such a force is not as I conceive or believe it to be.

Kant considers as an illusion this series of *conclusions* through which we induce from the conception of the thinking subject its determined and absolute existence... He is right, if we really want to induce from the conception or notion of a given reality, in its intimate sense, such a reality absolute in itself and independent of any feeling or conception, by deducing the absolute being from the conception given as assumption (like Descartes: I think, then I exist as a thinking thing); but such difficulty disappears if, instead of reasoning, we just accept the fact of the consciousness as containing the double and inseparable *subjective* and *objective* reality.

We really find in ourselves or in the feeling of a willing effort, the conception of an acting force or of a real cause that, as [feeling][†], has a subjective value, [and] the force or the substantial cause itself, which has an objective

† [*sentiment*]. Tisserand: *sentire* (to feel).

value, since it is always and identically a virtual force, constant energy, whereas it does not act in a determined manner. The transcendental conception of this absolute force constituting the essence or the durable aspect of the soul cannot be separated from the very first experience nor said to be derived from the reiterated experience.

“All the proofs of psychology that deal with the soul are merely founded on the perception of the *self*, our ipseity, simple and absolutely empty perception. Such a perception that, strictly speaking, cannot be defined as conception (because I conceive such a self only by attributing a predicate to it) is for us no other than the consciousness accompanying all our conceptions; however, once separated from all these conceptions, or in other words, once we abstract it from the act of thought, this intimate perception does not provide more than a certain something obscure or indefinable, that cannot be reduced to any conception. It is then necessary to come back to the reunification of the *self* with the thought”.¹⁷⁵ The simple perception of the *self* or of the acting force is not empty at all and does not need to be combined with any determined conception or sensation, in order to be related to our real and positive notion that is completely provided with the truth and the clearness of the feeling of our individual existence.

Although the self is conceived as essentially combined with whatever we define as thought or is a necessary element of it, we cannot conclude that this one element is a chimera or a certain something unclear and indefinable. On the contrary, the soul has always a feeling of the energy or power that constitutes its durable aspect, its personality, unity, absolute identity in any thought or variable modification. When I say: my soul self is a force, I am not stating a predicate of a subject, but I am expressing the real subject precisely as I observe and know it in itself, in its own essence and independently of any logical predicate or accidental mode.

“In order to make sure of the reality of the substance of soul, it would need more than the knowledge of our soul’s faculties: it would be necessary that the fundament of our own being was a datum for ourselves, or in other words, that we knew not the thought but the being who thinks”.¹⁷⁶ On the contrary, in order to doubt about reality, the substance or the force of the soul, it would be necessary that sensations or thoughts were given without the conception or

⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97: “Its proofs are merely founded on the perception of the *self*, our ipseity, simple and absolutely empty perception. Such a perception that, strictly speaking, cannot be reduced to any conception: so that it is finally necessary to come back to the reunification of the *self* with the thought”.

⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 98: “In order to make sure of this, it would be necessary more than [...] or in other words, that we knew not the *thought* but *the being who thinks*”.

the belief of a being who feels and thinks; if on one hand the fundament of our being is a force or a cause of movement, on the other hand it is also true that the fundament of our being is for us a datum independent of any accidental modification and that the exercise of imagination and reasoning or the knowledge of these faculties cannot assure us of the reality of our soul substance; but this reality is immediately felt or observed only by the intimate sense.

“The ipseity of the subject, the consciousness of which accompanies all my perception within myself, does not concern at all the perception of my soul as *object*, i.e. as it is in itself and independently of the intimate feeling”.¹⁷⁷ If the intimate sense of ipseity constitutes precisely the essence of the soul, it is impossible to strip the latter of the former, without annihilating it; precisely as, if resistance was the essence of matter, we cannot abstract from the former without removing the matter itself. It is true that we do not know if the soul stripped of such an intimate sense could not be still a real object for the supreme being; but it is nevertheless true that our ignorance on what could be the soul stripped of the property that makes it soul or acting and thinking being, our ignorance would not prevent us from conceiving its actual reality under such an essential attribute.

Kant's fault of reasoning lies always in the fact that from our invincible ignorance on what a thing is in itself he deduces our ignorance on the absolute reality of such a thing as we conceive it with the aid of our own faculties.

It is possible that a thing is different from the way in which we conceive it, that it has many attributes of which we are not aware; it is also possible that it is not more than what we know of it and that it contains nothing more than the attributes or the only attribute under which it manifests itself to our mind; man cannot judge on this issue, since he knows only through his own faculties; nevertheless he knows that the thing, which he conceives under an attribute essentially proper to its nature, does exist along with this attribute.

“Would I ever keep this consciousness of my own existence, if I did not have any representation of other beings as existing outside me; whereas, without them, I could not acquire any perception? It impossible to know that”.¹⁷⁸ I answer that my soul could be reduced to the feeling of its forces or of its constant action on the inert body, with no accidental perception, and this is precisely what happens during sleep; and what we do not conceive is our force reduced to the absolute inertia with no possible application; so, the substantial combination of a soul

⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 99: “The *ipseity* of the subject, the consciousness of which accompanies all my perception within myself, does not concern at all the perception of my soul as *object*, i.e. as my soul is in itself and independently of this intimate feeling of my ipseity”.

⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 100 ; only the last sentence is not consistent: “This is what I have not the possibility to know”.

with a body can be durable and extend to another mode of existence.

The knowledge of ourselves as substance beyond the act of thought, that is, beyond a determined thought or action, is not at all impossible and is rather entailed by the intimate feeling of existing; outside this intimate sense there is no possible knowledge, since there is no subject.

The way in which we feel basically willing to exert the faculty of thinking or the intimate sense of our personal and identical individuality – along with our own metaphysical disposition or this absolute that we define as our soul beyond any determined thought – is not at all an attribute nor a logical predicate of the thinking being; it rather constitutes the thinking being itself, since “what can only be conceived or observed as subject, without the possibility of being employed in its turn as predicate of another subject, exists then only as subject or substance”.¹⁷⁹ Now, the intimate sense of our individuality is not at all an attribute nor a predicate of the soul; it is rather the soul that feels and observes itself within the action that is essentially proper to it, and it could not be deprived of such an intimate sense, without stopping to be; it is then unnecessary to specify anything between this so-called attribute and the subject, and there are only the accidental modes of thought that can be considered as predicates of the thinking subject, so that the subject, who lies as a whole in the intimate sense of itself, and consequently this intimate sense may not be considered as predicate.

What is, “independently from its perceptions and thoughts, this self that feels, thinks and is conscious of its feeling and thinking?”¹⁸⁰ According to Kant, this is the Gordian knot of psychology or metaphysics of the soul. The answer to this question lies in the intimate sense; it is the thing itself that we require, although we perfectly know it. As for the intimate sense of its individuality, the self which is conscious of all that is felt and thought is independent of any accidental sensation or thought; it is itself. We demand what we know, and we do not know what we demand.¹⁸¹

Translated from the French by Gennaro Lauro

⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 101: “What can only be conceived as subject, without the possibility of being employed – in its turn – as predicate of another subject, exists then only as subject or *substance*”.

⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105: “The solution to this problem: ‘What is, independently from its perceptions and thoughts, this *self* that feels, thinks and is conscious of its feeling and thinking?’ is still for us the Gordian knot of *psychology*, or metaphysics of the soul”.

⁽¹⁸¹⁾ G.W. Leibniz, *Nouveaux Essais*, livre II, ch. 21 § 14, éd. Gerhardt t. V, p. 165: “They seek what they know, and they do not know what they seek”.