

ARTICLE

Did Rousseau Teach Kant Discipline?

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Abstract

Both Rousseau and Kant wrote their works with the intention of contributing to the well-being of humans. The ways in which Kant followed Rousseau to achieve this aim were many and go beyond those easily recognized. This article presents evidence for Rousseau's influence in the Discipline of Pure Reason chapter of the Doctrine of Method in the First *Critique*. Both Rousseau and Kant emphasized discipline as a necessary part of a proper education that leads to a well-ordered life. Kant's form of discipline is modeled on the education given to Emile. This approach to the Discipline chapter also affords an enlightening view of Kant's position in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*.

Keywords: Kant; Rousseau; *Critique of Pure Reason*; *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*; *Emile*; education

1. Introduction

Immanuel Kant begins the *Critique of Pure Reason* by articulating the source of the dissatisfaction which plagues reason.¹

Human reason has this peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened by questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason. (Avii)

But he ends the work by encouraging the reader to make a judgement about the attainability of a contentment for reason that did not seem possible in the situation described by the opening sentence:

If the reader has had pleasure and patience in traveling along in my company, then he can now judge, if it pleases him to contribute his part to making this footpath into a highway, whether or not that which many centuries could not accomplish might not be attained even before the end of the present one: namely, to bring human reason to full satisfaction in that which has always, but until now vainly, occupied its lust for knowledge. (A856/B884)

The critical path leads the reader from a condition in which one is always being compelled to ask that which one cannot answer to a state of complete satisfaction, at least regarding that with which reason occupies itself.

We know from Kant's private notes from the 1760s, now known as 'Remarks in the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*', that he himself felt the 'entire thirst for cognition' as well as a 'satisfaction at every acquisition' (BB, 20: 44). But in conjunction with this satisfaction came a contempt for the ordinary person (BB, 20: 44). In his encounter with the writings of J.-J. Rousseau, a pivotal moment in his coming upon the critical project, 'this blinding prejudice vanishes' (BB, 20: 44). Here, the labour of figuring out how one is to properly satisfy reason begins. The *Critique of Pure Reason* is the record of that path.

This record consists of two, unequal parts. The first is the Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, and the 'second main part of the transcendental critique' is the Transcendental Doctrine of Method (A15/B29; emphasis added). For this article I concentrate on the second, somewhat under-studied part.

The opening paragraphs of the Doctrine of Method, not unlike the opening of the Preface to the first edition, present us with an impossible task from which we cannot 'abstain' (A707/B735). Unlike the opening sentence of the book, however, it is not the asking of unanswerable questions but the erecting of a dwelling. The tower that 'we had in mind', 'that bold undertaking had to fail' (A712/B740; A707/B735). We feel seduced to build that which we know cannot stand. We are 'warned not to venture some arbitrary and blind project' that 'might entirely exceed our entire capacity', but the warning is necessary precisely because we are tempted to do exactly that (A707/B735). The Doctrine of Elements, as catalogue of materials, informs us that such a 'tower that would reach the heavens' is not possible (A707/B735). Add to this the 'confusion of languages that unavoidably divided the workers over the plan' and we have a recipe not only for failure but also for conflict (A707/B735). Kant's transcendental doctrine of method is designed to help consciousness overcome this tendency and be satisfied by giving it the 'formal conditions of a complete system' (A708/B736).

An essential part of this method for satisfying consciousness is the 'discipline of pure reason'. By 'discipline' Kant means 'the compulsion (*Zwang*) through which the constant propensity (*Hang*) to stray from certain rules is limited and finally eradicated' (A709/B737). Discipline is necessary because of 'humanity's general lust for knowledge' (A708/B736). In particular, it is required 'where the limits of our possible cognition are very narrow, where the temptation to judge is great, where the illusion that presents itself is very deceptive, and where the disadvantage of error is very serious' (A709/B737). In this realm there is 'neither empirical nor pure intuition' to keep 'reason in a visible track' (A711/B739). According to Kant, when it comes to reason's 'transcendental use in accordance with mere concepts', reason 'so badly needs a discipline to constrain its propensity to expansion beyond the narrow boundaries of possible experience and to preserve it from straying and error that the entire philosophy of pure reason is concerned merely with this negative use' (A711/B739). Further, the delusions and deceptions themselves are systematic and connected. It is not a matter of simply trying to randomly correct errors, rather it is 'a quite special and indeed negative legislation . . . a system of caution and self-examination out of the nature of pure reason and the objects of its pure use' (A711/B739). We have two

systems set against one another; one producing delusions, the other combatting them; both finding their origin in pure reason.

All of this leads me to think that it is insufficient to hold that Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is transforming metaphysics into a science, because this ignores the other transformation that he is seeking to accomplish, namely, transforming metaphysicians or philosophers into contented human beings. Both aims are present throughout the Transcendental Doctrine of Method, but we see them clearly in the first chapter, The Discipline of Pure Reason. In the first section, The Discipline of Pure Reason in Dogmatic Use, after refuting the possibility of philosophy imitating mathematics, Kant works at reversing the negative reciprocity of metaphysics – the empty exchange of claim versus counterclaim – with the positive reciprocity of science: the flourishing exchange of knowledge and its development (A712/B741). This is the transformation of metaphysics. Then in the second section, The Discipline of Pure Reason with regard to its Polemical Use, he turns to transforming the philosopher (A738/B766). He accomplishes this by presenting a discipline for the one doing the metaphysics. My thesis, put as pointedly as possible, is that Kant's method here is his adaptation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theory of education as expounded in *Emile*. In the latter part of that novel, as we shall see, Jean-Jacques, the tutor, states clearly that the only means at his disposal for bringing up Emile have been deception and violence.² In these two sections of the Doctrine of Method we find that Kant employs precisely these two tools. In both Rousseau and Kant, these means are not totally distinct. The violence seems real, and to a certain extent it is, but it is part of larger deception. Both Rousseau and Kant perpetrate elaborate ruses for the sake of making human beings whole. While I will not be able to claim to have proved this thesis until the end of the article, I begin by setting forth three *prima-facie* objections to this claim.

2. Preliminary objections

First of all, one may object that, unlike either David Hume or Thomas Hobbes, Rousseau's name never appears in these sections. It seems odd that Kant would not be hesitant to name some philosophers with whom he is in dialogue but would then leave out the one whom I claim he is following most closely. Second, the one passage that most commentators would agree does refer to Rousseau's writings appears to refer to it in such a way that Kant is distancing himself from, rather than embracing Rousseau's thought. Kant argues, as we shall see in detail below, that the split between appearance and reality, rather than depraving humanity, first civilizes it and finally moralizes it. This is obviously very different from Rousseau's position in the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*. Finally, it would seem that Kant's system of discipline, concerning as it does not 'the content but rather only the method of cognition from pure reason', is rather distant from the concerns of Rousseau's *Emile*, or *On Education*, a book that very much considers the proper content of our knowing (A712/B740).

To answer these preliminary objections in a preliminary way, I will proceed in reverse order. First, Kant's emphasis on both the usefulness and the negative nature of the discipline he proposes points to a link with Rousseau's educational project. For Kant 'discipline' means not so much 'instruction' (*Unterweisung*) or 'teaching'

(*Belehrung*) but ‘correction’ (*Zucht*) (A710/B738n.).³ Thus, he wants to maintain a distinction not between education and discipline but between an instruction in the sense of teaching and training by constraint. The latter is negative, and this parallels Rousseau’s main form of education. Here are Rousseau’s words:

Thus, the first education ought to be purely negative. It consists not at all in teaching virtue or truth but in securing the heart from vice and the mind from error.⁴ If you could do nothing and let nothing be done, if you could bring your pupil healthy and robust to the age of twelve without his knowing how to distinguish his right hand from his left, at your first lessons the eyes of his understanding would open up to reason. Without prejudice, without habit, he would have nothing in him which could hinder the effect of your care. Soon he would become in your hands the wisest of men; and in beginning by doing nothing, you would have worked an educational marvel. (*E*, 226)

Rousseau refers here to ‘first education’ and it is true that the tutor becomes more active as the education proceeds, but as we shall see the activity of the tutor is still largely and ultimately directed towards negative goals such as forestalling the emergence of bad tendencies. One way of preventing a bad tendency’s emergence is, paradoxically, to encourage its emergence in a controlled environment and then to stamp it violently out. This ensures that it will not appear again for some time. The tutor is aiming then at a ‘correction’ of the pupil that ‘eradicates’ bad tendencies. As we shall see in detail, Rousseau too is concerned not so much with the content as with the way his pupil knows something.

As for the second objection, we will examine the passage in question in detail. There we will discover that, while some commentators see it as contradicting Rousseau’s position in his *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, or the *First Discourse*, I see it as supporting Rousseau’s thinking in *Emile*.

Finally, the fact that Hume, Hobbes and others are mentioned by Kant while Rousseau’s name is left unsaid points to a more general problem scholars face in interpreting Kant’s sources. The influence of Hume and Hobbes is of a different kind than that of Rousseau. Kant learned something, and something quite specific, from Hume. He also saw Hume’s limitation in applying his (Hume’s) own insight. It is concerning a specific intellectual problem, namely causality, that Hume enabled Kant to see something new and important, and then Kant went beyond him. With Rousseau, it is rather a vision of the whole, the idea, of what it means to be human that Kant came to see. Kant never mastered Rousseau, rather he continually thought with and against him. I would go so far as to say, Kant simply went beyond Hume and left him behind but he wrote the *Critique of Pure Reason* with Rousseau looking over his shoulder.

3. *Emile* and The Discipline of Pure Reason

With these objections partially answered, I now turn to the main task of establishing the textual connections between Rousseau’s *Emile* and Kant’s *The Discipline of Pure Reason*. The connections are, as mentioned above, both direct and indirect. Kant refers to some of Rousseau’s ideas in *Emile*, and refers to them in ways that are more numerous and systematic than has been noticed up until now. At the same time, in

this section Kant clearly refers back to his own thinking in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics* (1766), a work clearly written in the midst of the strong impact that Rousseau's writings had on Kant.⁵ Thus, Kant's thinking in the *Critique of Pure Reason* on his own earlier position also reveals his thinking on Rousseau. Once these textual links are established, I will focus on how Kant adapts Rousseau's thinking on the way one moves reason from a state of war to a state of peace, that is from a negative form of reciprocity to a positive one. For Kant this state of war or the polemic of reason both exists and does not exist, the tactics he adopts both solve and do not solve the problem, and deception is used to get to the truth. These paradoxical ways are the outcomes of disciplining a tendency that forces one to go beyond experience in knowing when, in fact, one is incapable of doing that. This necessary but impossible situation is the ontological space in which both *Emile* and the first *Critique*, including the Discipline section, are written.

Rousseau showed Kant the way that reason undermines itself. As Richard Velkley has written:

Rousseau exposes the presence of a tendency within human rationality toward a self-destructive dialectic in which reason, in the guise of imagination, creates new objects for the desires and passions. These invented ideas of happiness hold out to humanity prospects of greater freedom, mastery, and contentment; in reality they enslave humanity to futile quests for satisfaction. (Velkley 1993: 84)

Thus, reason needs a discipline. Kant's opening sentence of the first chapter of the Doctrine of Method explains why, nevertheless, this discipline is held in such low esteem.

In humanity's general lust for knowledge, negative judgments, which are negative not merely on the basis of logical form but also on the basis of their content, do not stand in high regard: one regards them as the jealous enemies of our unremitting straining for the expansion of our cognition, and it almost takes an apology to earn toleration for them, let alone favour and esteem. (A708-9/B736-7)

The cause of the unfavourable evaluation of discipline is that it is constituted by negative judgements which are the 'jealous enemies' of our attempts to expand our knowledge. What could be wrong with wanting to expand knowledge? Recall that in Kant's confessional note about Rousseau's influence he states that he felt 'satisfaction at every acquisition' of knowledge. He 'despised the rabble who knows nothing'. But, he says, 'Rousseau has set me right' (BB, 20: 44). Expanding knowledge for its own sake is self-conceit.

Kant admits that it 'may certainly seem strange' that reason, 'which is properly obliged to prescribe its discipline for all other endeavours', itself needs discipline (A710/B738). Nevertheless, it has only escaped 'such a humiliation' because it is not suspected of substituting fancies for concepts and words for things. The use of the word 'humiliation' in the context of discipline is another clue that Kant is thinking of Rousseau, because humiliation plays such a central role in the forming of *Emile*.⁶

Kant goes on to explain that ‘by the polemical use of pure reason I understand the defence of its propositions against dogmatic denials of them’ (A739/B767). These dogmatic denials are not made by a ‘judge’ but rather are the ‘claims of its [pure reason’s] fellow citizens’ (A739/B767). Against a judge one must prove, but against fellow citizens one ‘has merely to defend’ oneself. One’s fellow citizen can be just as dogmatic ‘though in denial, as reason would be in its affirmation’ (A739/B767). In this situation an *ad hominem* justification provides reason with ‘a title to its possessions that need shrink from no foreign pretensions’ (A739/B767). This title is, however, ‘not a sufficient one’ (A740/B768). Reason cannot provide a compelling speculative proof of the immortality of the soul, of human freedom or of the existence of God. On the other hand, ‘it is completely certain that no one can ever prove the unlawfulness of this possession’ (A740/B768). Thus, the only need here is for reason to defend its possessions against those who deny its right to them on spurious grounds.

The ideas of ‘title’ and ‘possession’, of ‘defending’ and ‘protecting’, that run through this section of the first *Critique* show us that Kant is reflecting on the ‘place’ of the human subject as if it were a piece of property. He is thinking of what he will later refer to as *mein* and *dein*, ‘mine’ and ‘yours’.⁷ He wants to show that beyond violence there is a general will that peacefully grounds these kinds of claims. This general will works against the social forces that would deny a claim or drive a person from it violently. The notion of place and of teaching someone how to keep in their place is an important topic in Rousseau’s *Emile*⁸ and one that Kant commented on at length in his Remarks.⁹

The whole purpose of Rousseau’s negative pedagogy is to keep the person in his original place and to never let him leave it. In addition to the effects of the modern world that have made holding still difficult, the human condition itself is such that a person’s fortune, or that of his family, or that of his nation may change. But if his ‘place’ is first and foremost being human rather than being a magistrate, or a soldier or a priest, then ‘he will always be in his own place’, no matter what fortune might do (E, 166).

How, concretely, does the tutor, Jean-Jacques, keep his pupil, Emile, in place? He does it through deception and violence. As Rousseau writes late in the book, until the student has become an adult, ‘you [the reader as the putative tutor] got nothing from him [your pupil or Emile] except by force or ruse’ (E, 484). Violence and deception are the central tenets in Rousseau’s educational programme. For Kant’s part, this concern for the place that a human can claim is dealt with in the section on the polemical use of reason and in the section on hypotheses that follows it. As we will see, it is precisely in these sections that Kant allows the use of deception and violence.

The roots of the deceit and violence are found in the condition of the human knower. Kant describes this condition: ‘providence has set many objects, although they are intimately connected with our highest interest, so high that it is barely granted to us to encounter them in an indistinct perception, doubted even by ourselves’ (A743–4/B771–2). That is, we desperately want to know and yet can never be certain. In fact, Kant gives us the perfect description of our scandalous situation when he writes that ‘our searching glance is more enticed than satisfied’ (A744/B772).

The desperate desire to know combines with the enticements to conjure up metaphysical ghosts. And these ghosts partake in a polemic of reason that both exists and does not exist. Kant tells us at least three times, ‘there is properly no antithetic of

pure reason at all' (A743/B771; see also A750/B778 and A756/B784). Nevertheless, 'the dispute reveals nothing but a certain antinomy of reason' (A744/B772). And thus, although 'if one looks ... to what properly should happen, there really must not be any polemic of pure reason', nevertheless Kant allows that there is a polemical use of reason (A750/B778). The 'combatants' participating in the polemic have no real weapons and their battle will be 'bloodless' (A747/B775). There is no point in our 'charging in with a sword' (A747/B775). We can watch the conflict 'peaceably from the safe seat of critique' and it will even be 'entertaining' (A744/B772). Kant compares the parties of the conflict to the 'heroes of Valhalla' who 'fence in the air and wrestle with their shadows', the shadows which cleave apart only to 'grow back together again in an instant' (A756/B784).¹⁰

In the midst of this polemic that does not 'really' exist comes a passage that both Volker Gerhardt, one of the leading scholars of this part of the first *Critique*, and I agree refers to Rousseau. However, Gerhardt sees Kant offering here a 'socio-psychological mechanism' that helps human beings to develop morally. This mechanism is offered 'against Rousseau' (Gerhardt 1998: 584). I rather see it as following Rousseau.

Kant argues that there is 'a certain dishonesty (*Unlauterkeit*) in human nature' (A747/B775), and this does seem to stand over against Rousseau's view that 'the first movements of nature are always right. There is no original perversity in the human heart' (*E*, 225). Further, Kant holds that the human 'propensity to conceal themselves as well as to assume an appearance that is advantageous for them ... have not merely *civilized* ... but gradually *moralized*' them (A748/B776). This view again seems to oppose Rousseau's view in his *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* that the split between being and appearance has caused not the moralization but the depravity of the human species. But this ignores the context of the argument. Kant sees Rousseau's writings as divided between those that are diagnostic of the problems of the human situation and those that are written to deliver us from the labyrinth (see *Anthropology*, 7: 326). Rousseau's *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts* (1750) belongs to the former, but *Emile* to the latter. Kant's basic position is in fact very much like Rousseau's in that it holds that all things found in nature are good. Kant spells this out when he writes in a very Rousseauian manner: 'Everything that nature itself arranges is good for some aim. Even poisons serve to overpower other poisons which are generated in our humours, and therefore may not be omitted from a complete collection of cures (medicines)' (A743/B771). This calls to mind Rousseau's opening sentence of *Emile*. 'Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the author of things' (*E*, 161). For Kant 'the suasions and the self-conceit of our purely speculative reason' are 'themselves put forth by the nature of this reason' and not some so evil perversion of it (A743/B771). Accordingly, they also have 'their good vocation and aim, which one must not cast to the wind' (A743/B771).

Further, the goodness that the dishonesty produces is dependent upon deception and concealment. It must be so total that 'no one could penetrate the mask of respectability, honourableness, and propriety' (A748/B776). Only in this way does the unknowing person find a 'school for self-improvement in the supposedly genuine examples of the good which he saw around himself' (A748/B776). We have already drawn the parallel between Kant's 'Discipline' and Rousseau's education: the use of the word 'school' here underlines the fact that Kant is thinking of a pedagogical project and that *Emile*, not the *First Discourse*, serves as his model.

Reading Jean-Jacques' treatment of *Emile*, learning in detail about the schemes that the tutor devises in order to keep *Emile* on the path of nature is a shocking experience. For his part, Kant acknowledges this aspect of the plan.

To incite reason against itself, to hand its weapons to both sides, and then to watch its heated struggle quietly and scornfully is not seemly from a dogmatic point of view, but rather has the look of a spiteful and malicious cast of mind. If, however, one takes regard of the inexorable deception and bragging of the sophists, who will not be moderated by any critique, then there is really no other course but to set the boasting of one side against another, which stands on the same rights, in order at least to shock reason, by means of the resistance of an enemy, into raising some doubts about its pretensions and giving a hearing to the critique. (A756–7/B784–5)

Shock, scandal and creating a victim are exactly Rousseau's procedure in *Emile*. Rousseau argues that, in some cases at least, there is no other way to stop the violence except through a well-administered dose of it. Kant recognizes again here the limits of critique and finds that only this kind of deception and violence can bring peace.

It would seem that this cannot be so. For Kant 'one can regard the critique of pure reason as the true court of justice for all controversies of pure reason' (A751/B779). It does not feign ignorance or incapacity in the face of these controversies. Rather, being uninvolved in these disputes, which pertain to objects, pure reason is 'set the task of determining and judging what is lawful in reason in general in accordance with the principles of its primary institution' (A751/B779). This sounds like the opposite of violence and, indeed, Kant intends it as an alternative.

Kant lays out the alternatives in this way. If there were no critique, no court of justice, then reason is in the 'state of nature' and 'cannot make its assertions and claims valid or secure them except through war' (A751/B779). The critique 'grants us the peace of a state of law'; there we 'should not conduct our controversy except by *due process*' (A751/B779). Unlike the state of nature where the quarrel ends in a 'victory', in the state of law it ends in a 'verdict' (A751–2/B779–80). The critique gets to the root of the problem and thus 'must secure a perpetual peace' (A752/B780).

Kant invokes Hobbes, not Rousseau, at this point and agrees that 'the state of nature is a state of injustice and violence, and one must necessarily leave it in order to submit himself to the lawful coercion which alone limits our freedom in such a way that it can be consistent with the freedom of everyone else and thereby with the common good' (A752/B780). Nevertheless, I argue that, unlike Hobbes, Kant does not see this necessary leaving of the state of nature as simply a non-violent, rational choice that enlightened human beings make. Even within the civil state there is backsliding and breakdown. Kant acknowledges that the court of reason can and does fail.

Nothing seems clearer than that between the two, one of whom asserts that the world has a beginning, and the other that it has no beginning but has existed from eternity, one of them has to be right. But if this is so, then because there is equal evidence on both sides, it is impossible ever to ascertain which side is right, and so the conflict drags on as before, even though the parties

have been directed by the *court of reason* to hold their peace. (A501/B529; emphasis added)

The crisis that every government fears is upon us: the judicial pronouncement has no effect. So Kant clearly understood that one either settled differences through the verdict of the court or the victory of war. Sometimes the court's verdict is ineffective and so the other way must be followed. Instead of pure reason ending the dispute with a verdict against both parties, one must let the conflict continue. In a very real sense the critique of pure reason has failed – failed to establish peace. The parties are to keep refuting each other until they themselves become convinced that they are 'disputing about nothing, and that a certain transcendental illusion has portrayed a reality to them where none is present' (A501/B529–30). This is the path that is left, when 'settling a dispute that cannot be decided by a final judgment' (A502/B530).

When the parties do not accept reason's verdict, then a violent necessity is imposed that only allows one to leave the state of nature via violence. Violence itself violently imposes a non-violent order. We shall look at how this is accomplished in a moment.

Before doing that, I want to briefly examine the 'intermezzo' that Kant inserts between the second and third sections of this chapter. He titles it, 'On the Impossibility of a Sceptical Satisfaction of Pure Reason that is Divided Against itself' (A758–69/B786–97). In this section Kant closes off one last escape route from the violent encounter between the claims and counterclaims of pure reason. He does this in conversation with sceptics like Hume, whom he mentions. I want to suggest that here too Rousseau hovers in the background.

Rousseau instructed Kant in the 'method of doubt'. As the latter wrote in the Remarks:

The doubt that I assume is not dogmatic, but a doubt of postponement. Zetetics (ζήτησις) searchers. I will raise reasons from both sides. It is amazing that one worries about danger from that. . . . The method of doubt is useful because it *preserves* the mind, not to act according to speculation, but according to common sense and *sentiment*. I seek the honour of *Fabius Cunctator*. (BB, 20: 175)

This kind of doubt prescribes a self-correcting path for reason in which the sciences are useful precisely to the degree that they bring with them 'the hindrance of those ills that they [the sciences] themselves have brought on' (BB, 20: 39). This thought is entirely from Rousseau.

For Kant it is also 'an entirely vain attempt' for reason to just leave doubts about the metaphysical questions to stand by adopting some 'principle of *neutrality* in these controversies' (A756/B854). This echoes Kant's words in the Preface to the A edition where he said that, while it is, on the one hand, 'pointless to affect *indifference* with respect to such [metaphysical] inquiries, to whose object human nature *cannot* be *indifferent*', we must, on the other, give the phenomenon of such indifference 'our attention and reflection' (Ax–xi). Kant sees such reaction as not simply being a manifestation of 'the thoughtlessness of our age, but of its ripened *power of judgment*, which will no longer be put off with illusory knowledge' (Axi). Kant is referring here to Rousseau's 'Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar', in which the Vicar makes

consistent protests of not knowing and not caring about difficult metaphysical questions that seem to have no bearing on our moral life.¹¹ Kant does not see Rousseau as thoughtless, rather he regards these protests of indifference as a sign of a growing critical spirit that would be more open to his approach. This is one of the motivations behind his new conception of metaphysics as ‘a science of the *limits of human reason*’, words which Kant wrote for himself in the Remarks and then published in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* in 1766 (BB, 20: 181, and then TG, 2: 368; only in the latter text do the words appear in italics).

4. Hypotheses

We have seen that Kant works to convince his readers that standing in the neutral corner is useless: one must fight. He now hands them their weapons – hypotheses. The weapons themselves are as problematic as the objects over which they joust. Nonetheless, Kant argues that hypotheses are ‘entirely admissible for defending’ propositions: they are permitted ‘not in dogmatic but in polemical use’ (A776/B804). Now, given that there really is no polemic of pure reason, then we can expect hypotheses to occupy a similarly ambiguous position. For Kant, defending a proposition is negative. It is not an augmenting ground of proof for an assertion, but ‘the mere frustration of the opponent’s illusory insight, which would demolish our own asserted propositions’ (A776/B804). We are caught in a world in which neither side can be certain of its knowledge. The one knows just as little as the other. ‘This equality in the lot of human reason favours neither of them in speculative cognitions, there is thus the true battleground of feuds that can never be resolved’ (A776/B804). The influence of Rousseau on this position should not be overlooked. It was Rousseau who taught Kant about ‘this equality in the lot of human reason’ and taught him that this equality leads to conflict that then needs to find a way to be settled. Rousseau showed how this is done in his novel *Emile*.

In particular, Rousseau showed his way of settling disputes in the examples that he gave. I want to examine one example in detail and then show how I think it informs Kant’s thinking in this part of the first *Critique*.

The example we will look at comes up because Rousseau holds ‘it to be impossible to bring a child along to the age of twelve in the bosom of society without giving him some idea of the relations of man to man and of the morality of human actions’ (E, 230–1). Recall that Rousseau’s ideal of *negative* education is such that he puts off as much as he can allowing any of the rational faculties of the child to develop. But here he is forced to have a hand in the positive development of the child’s moral understanding due to ‘the sole intention of *preventing* him [the child] from believing himself master of everything and doing harm to others without scruple and without knowing it’ (E, 231; emphasis added). That is, even though the example involves actively developing some of the potential of the student, its goal is negative, to prevent delusions and the harm that comes from them. Rousseau admits that there exist ‘violent natures whose ferocity develops early and whom one must hasten to make into men so as not to be obliged to put them into chains’ (Emile is not one of these violent natures) (E, 231). The problem is violence and moving the child out of the ‘late’ state of nature, which is a state of war, to a peaceful relation with others.

Rousseau proposes to give an example of what he would do if he had to guide one of those violent children. Even though this child is not in fact Emile, we find, similar to the case of reason's conflict, which is not real and whose weapons are not real weapons, that the child both is and is not Emile. Rousseau demonstrates this in the narrative by beginning the example using Emile but then substituting the reader's pupil for him.

He begins by noting that a child learns 'by experience to respect whoever surpasses him in age and strength' (E, 231). Simply put, children learn that any violence that they exercise on someone who is stronger than them is revisited upon them in a painful manner. However, property does not defend itself, and so the first 'moral' idea a child needs is that of property or, one could say, the child needs to understand that violence exercised on a thing is indirectly violence exercised on its owner and this violence must redound onto the child. In order for him to 'have this idea, he must have something that belongs to him' (E, 231).

Rousseau's method for inculcating this idea, that is, for creating the situation in which the child experiences that something 'belongs' to him, is simple and profound. 'The thing to do therefore is to go back to the origin of property, for it is there that the first idea of it ought to be born' (E, 232).

Emile lives in the country. Especially at his age he wants to imitate. He will have had the experience of seeing gardens ploughed and sowed, sprouting and growing. He will want one. The tutor is all in with Emile. He writes: 'I share his taste. I work with him, not for his pleasure, but for mine; at least he believes it to be so' (E, 232). They till the soil in a seemingly unused corner of the garden. Finally, Emile takes possession of a piece of land by planting a bean in it. 'And surely this possession is more sacred and more respectable than that taken of South America when Núñez Balboa in the name of the King of Spain planted his standard on the shore of the South Seas' (E, 232).

Each day tutor and pupil visit the garden, carefully watering it. The pupil experiences joy as he sees the beans beginning to sprout. The tutor cultivates the joy he has planted in the child's heart 'by saying to him: "This belongs to you"' (E, 232). Unusually, Jean-Jacques even explains to Emile the term 'belong'. Jean-Jacques goes on: 'I make him feel that he has put his time, his labor, his effort, finally his person there; that there is something of himself he can claim against anyone whomsoever, just as he could withdraw his arm from the hand of another man who wanted to hold on to it in spite of him' (E, 232).

This story then takes an unexpected turn. One day they arrive at their property and 'all the beans are rooted out, the plot is torn up, the very spot is not to be recognized' (E, 232). What has happened? 'Who has stolen my goods?' Emile's heart feels the 'first sentiments of injustice'. 'The grieving child fills the air with moans and cries' (E, 232). For his part the tutor 'partake[s] of his pain, his indignation' (E, 232). They investigate and discover that the gardener, Robert, did the deed. He is called.

But surprise, surprise, it is Robert who is indignant and who claims to have been violated. 'What sirs! Is it you who have ruined my work? I had sown Maltese melons there, the seed of which had been given me as a treasure and with which I had hoped to regale you when they were ripe. . . . You destroyed my melons for me when they were already sprouting and they can never be replaced' (E, 232-3).

There follows a conversation in which apologies and reparations are made. A new agreement is reached. Jean-Jacques says that they will never work the land before

knowing whether someone has put his hand to it before them. Robert replies that then they will work no land, because all of it has been ‘occupied for a long time’ (E, 233). Emile has no garden, but that is not Robert’s concern. His concern is to protect his efforts. He ends with a warning: ‘I will go and plow up your beans if you touch my melons’ (E, 233).

The child has learned about the right of first occupant, but the lesson is not over because the child has not really advanced beyond ‘might makes right’. Robert’s threat to destroy Emile’s work in the future if he violates his property is the sanction that makes the law work. Violence will be repaid with violence. But someday Emile may be bigger than Robert and the mere claim that Robert was there first will not be sufficient.

So Rousseau continues the story by presenting us with a child, no longer Emile, who ‘ruins everything he touches’ (E, 234). He breaks the furniture he uses; he even breaks the windows in his room. Through all this the tutor is to express no anger but is to make certain that the child feels the consequences of what he does. A few chilly nights with unrepaired windows. If he breaks the windows again then one changes one’s method. Now the child is informed by the tutor that ‘the windows are mine; they were put there by my efforts; I want to protect them’ (E, 234). The child is then locked up in a windowless room. The child’s rants and raves are ignored. The child moans and groans but the domestics are to show no sympathy and simply say: ‘I too have windows to protect’ (E, 234). Once the child has felt the pain of isolation, someone is to suggest to him that he should propose to the tutor ‘an agreement by means of which [the tutor] will give him back his freedom if he no longer breaks windows’ (E, 234). The child asks to see the tutor, the proposal is made and immediately accepted. The tutor ‘regards this agreement as sacred and inviolable as if an oath had been given on it’ (E, 234). In this way the child learns about ‘the faith of commitments and their utility’ (E, 234).

For Rousseau the story of the garden plot and the story of the windows are two parts of one story, and they are both simply ‘links in a chain’ (E, 234). We are to see what the child could not, that as soon as he planted a bean, he was also ‘digging a dungeon where his science would shut him up’ (E, 235). Contrary to appearances, the story has not been about property or land, but about the use of science or knowledge, about claims and counterclaims. The child has learned how to respect a claim and thus how to make a claim that can be respected, and all this can now be done without violence. The child has been brought out of the state of nature into the civil state.

If we turn to Kant and his use of hypotheses, the similarities begin to appear. Kant begins the most important paragraph by stating: ‘Hypotheses are therefore allowed in *the field of pure reason* only as weapons of war, not for grounding a right but only for defending it’ (A777/B805; emphasis added). For Kant too this is not only a violent encounter it is also an educational enterprise. We have to learn something. He writes the following about objections to our own claims:

We must search them out like old but unexpired claims, in order to ground perpetual peace on their annihilation. External quiet is only illusory. The seed of the attacks, which lies in the nature of human reason, must be extirpated; but how can we extirpate it if we do not give it freedom, indeed even

nourishment, to send out shoots, so that we can discover it and afterward eradicate its roots? (A777–8/B805–6)

‘Old but unexpired claims’ are a threat to the claim being made and thus to peace, just as Robert’s claim is a hidden threat to Emile’s. Robert did not immediately dig up the seeds that Emile planted. He let them send out shoots and then eradicated them and in the process extirpated Emile’s claim. Perpetual peace is only established by annihilating some claims and grounding others on more solid grounds. But the claims to be annihilated cannot even be discovered unless we allow the seeds to sprout.

Kant goes on to say that you, that is, us, his readers, must ‘think up for yourself the objections which have not yet occurred to any opponent, and even lend him the weapons or concede him the most favorable position that he could desire’. The reason behind this directive is that ‘there is nothing in this to fear, though much to hope, namely that you will come into a possession that can never be attacked in the future’ (A778/B806). Rousseau’s story of Robert, the gardener, ends with Emile making a solemn promise to respect the property of others. He comes to this position having had his own work ruined, when Robert tore out the beans by their roots and then having lost his freedom altogether, when the tutor locked him in a dark room. Thus, Kant proposes what Rousseau has demonstrated by going beyond the first part of the story to think of even other objections, other ways in which the child might not yet have reached the state of law. Having lent his arms to Emile so that the ground could be ploughed, and helping him water the beans, he now even lends the child the weapon of breaking windows, expensive items in eighteenth-century Europe. All this is done in the hope of coming into a possession that is secure.

If I am correct in seeing Rousseau’s *Emile* in the background in the chapter on ‘Discipline’, it is also important to point out how Kant not only diverges from Rousseau’s thinking, but goes beyond it.

In the second section on the polemical use of hypotheses Kant goes against those who would protect young people from the scandal of false opinions. He recommends educating young people by exposing them to dangerous propositions and their seductions as early as possible, precisely to deprive these positions of the advantage of novelty. Knowing just one side of a polemic, and believing it to be the only side, induces young people to see the other side as more attractive once they do learn of it.

More important to Kant than any weapon the pupil may need to combat the opposing position is learning ‘how to develop the hidden dialectic which lies no less in his own breast than in that of his counterpart’ (A754/B783). Kant develops this thought in the following section as well. After granting that hypotheses are allowed as defensive weapons of war, he writes that ‘we must always seek the enemy here in ourselves. For speculative reason in its transcendental use is dialectical *in itself*. The objections to be feared lie in ourselves’ (A777/B805).

We saw above the degree to which Kant accepts that deception or disingenuousness are part of what educates us into civilization and morality. He learned this from reading about the way the tutor, Jean-Jacques, perpetrates a massive deception on his pupil. He leads the pupil into misdeeds and then lets him be caught in those misdeeds. But Kant sees what Rousseau cannot. The split between the tutor and the pupil, between Jean-Jacques and Emile, is effective for drama, for telling a story, but the real conflict takes place within each one of us. ‘We must always seek the enemy here

in ourselves.’ It is our own rationality that is torn asunder and leads to these conflicts. Thus, this section on the use of hypotheses is the completion of section 9 of the Antinomy of Pure Reason, in which Kant writes that, by keeping the conclusions made there in mind, ‘the self-conflict of reason will be entirely at an end” (A516/B544). Reason will be brought into agreement with itself. For this, discipline is necessary. For Rousseau, Jean-Jacques is above the conflict even when he pretends to be a part of it. He is in the background directing everything and thus above it.

Here, the intellectual position has a clear moral implication because intellectual falsehood is built on a morally dogmatic self-conceit. You can only make your property claim or your intellectual claim secure – can only establish perpetual peace – by vanquishing the self-conceit in your opponent. Rousseau showed Kant how that was to be done. This is the reason why both Rousseau and Kant go into all this. The example with Robert seems to be non-intellectual. And it is, but Kant saw that with Rousseau the knower has to occupy a certain moral position (that of the victim) in order to intellectually recognize the truth. Emile is the victim of Robert and of Jean-Jacques. In the story he is made to look like the victimizer and this too is crucial, but we, the reader, have to grasp what Emile does not, that he is the victim and that it is this status that allows him to grasp the claim of Robert. This is how we get to perpetual peace. In Kant this gets translated so that the one who is attacked can put forward these hypotheses and these will allow the dialectic to develop and the seeds to sprout, so that they can be torn up. The beans Emile planted were planted with the intent on the part of the tutor (pure reason) that they would be torn up.

This world of polemic is not quite real and so Kant takes away all that he gives, just as Jean-Jacques takes away the beans he gave Emile. The Antinomy of pure reason is not a real antinomy, the fighting that is to lead to peace is not real fighting. Kant says that the hypotheses on both sides are ‘leaden weapons’ not capable of establishing anything.

5. Looking back to *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*

This world that is filled with things that both exist and do not exist has an uncanny feel to it. Kant gives the reader some orientation in this world through his examples of how to use the leaden weapons of hypotheses in a defensive, that is, negative, manner. Suppose your opponent denies the existence of the ‘immaterial nature of the soul’ on the grounds that ‘experience seems to prove that both the elevation as well as the derangement of our mental powers are merely different modifications of our organs’. Kant advises us:

You can weaken the power of this proof by assuming that our body is nothing but the fundamental appearance to which the entire faculty of sensibility and therewith all thinking are related, as their condition, in our present state (of life). Separation from the body would be the end of the sensible use of your cognitive power and the beginning of the intellectual. The body would thus be not the cause of thinking but merely a restricting condition on it, thus it would be regarded as furthering the sensible and animal but for that reason all the more as hindering the pure and spiritual life, and the dependence of the

former on the corporal constitution would prove nothing about the dependence of life in its entirety on the state of our organs. (A778–9/B806–7)

Or suppose that someone raises the objection that the contingency of our biological conception argues against the possibility of eternal life. That is, an existence whose origin is so fraught with trivial circumstances cannot have an eternal vocation. Kant admits ‘with regard to each individual [contrary to the species] it certainly seems questionable to expect such a powerful effect from such inconsequential causes’, but ‘you could propose a transcendental hypothesis’ (A779/B807):

[A]ll life is really only intelligible, not subject to temporal alterations at all, and has neither begun at birth nor will be ended through death; that this life is nothing but mere appearance, i.e. a sensible representation of the pure spiritual life, and the entire world of the senses is a mere image, which hovers before our present kind of cognition and, like a dream, has no objective reality in itself; that if we could intuit the things and ourselves *as they are* we would see ourselves in a world of spiritual natures with which our only true community had not begun with birth nor would cease with bodily death (as mere appearances); etc. (A780/B808)

This passage echoes what Kant wrote in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. There he held that ‘all the morality of actions, while never having its full effect in the corporeal world of man according to the order of nature, may well do so in the spirit-world, according to pneumatic laws’ (TG, 2: 323). Further, he argued:

[I]n respect of the immaterial world, in accordance with pneumatic laws, and in virtue of the connection between the private and the general will, in other words, in virtue of the connection between the unity and the whole of the spirit-world, these same things will either exercise an effect which is consonant with the moral quality of the free will, or themselves be reciprocally affected by such an effect, which is consonant with the whole of morality, in the immediate community of spirits. (TG, 2: 336)

This leads Kant to hold that there is no contradiction in asserting that in this case the human soul already in this life ‘occupies its place among the spirit-substances of the universe, just as, in accordance with the laws of motion, the various types of matter in space adopt an order, consonant with their corporeal powers, relatively to each other’ (TG, 2: 336).

Now it is precisely this section of *Dreams* that Kant refers to in a 1766 letter to Mendelssohn. He writes:

This investigation resolves itself into another, namely, whether one can by means of rational inferences discover a *primitive* power, that is, the primary, fundamental relationship of cause to effect. And since I am certain that this is impossible, it follows that, if these powers are not given in experience, they can only be the product of invention. But this invention (an heuristic fiction or hypothesis) can never even be proved to be possible, and it is a mere delusion

to argue from the fact of its conceivability (which has its plausibility only because no impossibility can be derived from the concept either). Such delusions are Swedenborg's daydreams, though I myself tried to defend them against someone who would argue that they are impossible; and my analogy between a real moral influx by spiritual beings and the force of universal gravitation is not intended seriously; it is only an example of how far one can go in philosophical fabrications, completely unhindered, when there are no *data*, and it illustrates how important it is, in such exercises, first to decide what is required for a solution of the problem and whether the necessary data for a solution are really available. (*Briefe*, 10: 72)

Kant goes on to speak of whether *birth*, *life* and *death* are matters that we can ever hope to understand by reason.

In all this we see a strong continuity in his thought stretching from *Dreams*, through the Mendelssohn letter, to the Discipline chapter of the *First Critique*.

Thus, the *Critique of Pure Reason* teaches us how to read *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. We are to read what Kant asserts there not as a serious assertion, but neither is it a joke. It arises in the context of something to be 'pleaded against an attack' (A780/B808). Still, Kant claims that 'we proceed quite rationally here' (A780/B808). That is, rationality is something that makes things up when attacked and fights the opponent who thinks he knows everything by showing him, first, that the lack of empirical conditions does not constitute a proof of complete impossibility, since these are not the same thing, and second, that the laws of experience do not span the entire field of possible things in themselves. The important point, it seems to me, is Kant's claim that he who turns such 'hypothetical countermeasures against the pretensions of his rashly negative opponent must not be considered to hold them as his own genuine opinions. He abandons them as soon as he has finished off the dogmatic self-conceit of his opponent' (A781/B809). It is one thing to modestly 'refuse and deny' the opposed assertion of something else. One cannot go on and make these objections 'valid as proofs of the opposite'; do that and your claim is 'no less proud and conceited' than that of your opponent (A781/B809).

Kant stresses that these 'hypotheses have no validity as opinions in themselves, but only relative to opposed transcendent pretensions', that is, they only have validity in a conflictual context (A781/B809). 'For the extension of the principles of possible experience to the possibility of things in general is just as *transcendent* as the assertion of the objective reality of such concepts, which can never find their objects anywhere but outside the boundaries of all possible experience' (A781/B809).

This relative validity of the hypotheses does not reduce them to mere 'opinions', for pure reason 'contains no opinions at all' (A781/B809). They are problematic judgments which can neither be refuted nor proved and yet cannot be dispensed with. They are necessary and impossible. They are scandalous. 'One must preserve them in this quality, and 'carefully make sure that they are not believed in themselves as having an absolute validity' (A782/B810). If this were to be forgotten, these hypotheses will 'drown reason in fictions and deception' (A782/B810).

6. Conclusion

The influence of Rousseau on Kant goes deep. We are now in a better position to judge just how deep. At the end of the 'Preface' to the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, we find Rousseau asking the reader to look at human society 'with calm and disinterested attention' (DI, 15). One's first reaction is shock due to having to confront the violence of powerful men and the oppression of the weak. Human establishments appear, again at first glance, 'to be founded on piles of quicksand' (DI, 15). So, one must examine them closely and set aside 'the dust and sand that surround the Edifice' (DI, 15). Then 'one perceives the unshakeable base upon which it is built' and so 'one learns to respect its foundations' (DI, 15–16).

Rousseau is describing a process of attraction and repulsion that has a teleology. It leads us to a 'serious study of man, his natural faculties and their successive developments' (DI, 16). This serious study gives one the ability to make distinctions between the first fleeting impressions of violence and oppression versus the more considered understanding of the unshakeableness of the base. Rousseau tells us that 'the Political and the moral researches occasioned by the important question I examine are useful in all ways' (DI, 16). They are instructive because from them 'we ought to learn to bless him whose beneficial hand, correcting our institutions and giving them an unshakeable base, has prevented disorders which must otherwise have resulted from them and so created our happiness from the means that seemed likely to heighten our misery' (DI, 16).

Rousseau's use of the first person plural, 'we', to speak about those who learn to bless the one who has corrected our institutions encourages us to read this closing sentence of the 'Preface' as if Rousseau were including himself with those who learn and excluding himself from being the object of the blessing. This is misleading. Rousseau corrects our institutions through his writings; he gives them an unshakeable base; he works not only to prevent disorders but to create human happiness out of the very means that seem to lead to our misery.

We can now grasp how closely Kant followed Rousseau. Kant, too, saw himself as a legislator of the human race. For Kant philosophy is 'the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*)' (A839/B867). Kant has given us a corrected understanding of what it is to know. His critique is designed to prevent disorder, but most tellingly, the *Critique of Pure Reason* is designed to create our happiness from the means that seemed most likely to heighten our misery. The transcendental dialectic of pure reason has constantly subverted reason, drawing it into a whole history of useless speculation concerning unknowable objects. The resulting controversies have refused to keep themselves limited to the classroom or scholarly debates but keep spilling out into the street causing disorder and unhappiness. Attempts to simply outlaw metaphysics have proven totally ineffective, since metaphysics is part of who we humans are. So, Kant has taken this tendency of reason to overstep its boundaries and shown us how to transform it through discipline from something that causes disorder to something that brings about order.

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Notes

- 1 References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* will follow the convention of giving the A/B pagination. I will be using the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* for the English translation. For *Träume eines Geistessehers Erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysic*, the text is contained in Kant 1992 (abbreviation TG). For *Bemerkungen in den 'Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen'* I have used the translation found in Kant 2011. I refer to it as 'Remarks'; it is abbreviated as BB. The translation from the *Anthropology* is from Kant 2007. The translation from Kant's correspondence is from Kant 1999.
- 2 All references to *Emile* are to the edition in volume 4 of Rousseau's *Œuvres complètes* (Rousseau 1959–95), with translation in Rousseau 2010 (vol. 13 of Rousseau 1990–); I will use the abbreviation E. The *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men* is found in volume 3 of the *Œuvres complètes*, with translation in Rousseau 1992 (vol. 3 of Rousseau 1990–); I will use the abbreviation DI. Since the English translations provides the pagination of the *Œuvres complètes*, I will simply provide the English page numbers.
- 3 Kant's reception of the importance of negative education goes back to the 1760s and is well recorded in the Remarks. 'The current moralists presuppose much as ill and want to teach to overcome it, and presuppose much temptation to evil and prescribe motivations to overcome it. The Rousseauian method teaches to hold the former for no ill and, thus, the latter for no temptation' (BB, 20: 17). He often notes how Rousseau's method is not one of overcoming bad tendencies, but never letting them develop. See BB, 20: 39 and 77–8.
- 4 Recall Kant's words at the beginning of the chapter on the discipline of pure reason: 'negative judgments have the special job solely of preventing error' (A709/B737).
- 5 See Alberg (2015).
- 6 See Alberg (2007: esp. 46–50).
- 7 We could profit from a careful comparison of this section of the first *Critique* with 'The Universal Doctrine of Right, Part I, Private Right: Concerning what is Externally Mine or Yours in General' from *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797). Unfortunately, this goes beyond the scope of the present article.
- 8 See Burgelin (1961) for a development of this particular theme in *Emile*.
- 9 See Alberg (2015: esp. 178–9).
- 10 Let us not forget that the warriors of Valhalla were waiting and preparing for Doomsday – the apocalyptic end of time.
- 11 See also Alberg (2019).

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