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Kant's Semiotics and Hermeneutics in the 1760s

Abstract: In this contribution, we first discuss the aspects of the analytic method conceived by Kant in the *Deutlichkeit* that differentiate it from the Wolffian method and relate it to the Newtonian method. Compared to the philosophical tradition, the task of analysing concepts appears profoundly changed. Since Kant aims philosophy towards the world, he considers concepts as something given and intends to discern their characteristic marks by observing their usual applications. Although Kant abandons any attempt to define concepts nominally, he still gives great relevance to words to the extent that concepts, according to him, acquire their meaning in the linguistic usage. We will also point out how for Kant the linguistic usage makes the analysis of concepts anything but easy and how a hermeneutic process is necessary for its completion. In distinguishing philosophical signs from mathematical signs, Kant provides the semiotic reasons that underlie his recourse to hermeneutics.

1 The Analytic Method

In the decade of the 1760s, Kant's thought is characterized by the refusal of the Wolffian philosophical method, so strongly inspired by mathematics as the only discipline in which "in every respect we go by the Rules of a genuine Logic."¹ In Kant's view, behind the ostentatious respect for principles, the accuracy of definitions, and the concatenation of syllogistic demonstrations, the Wolffian method conceals a certain ease, if not real arrogance,² that allows philosophers to promptly answer the most difficult metaphysical questions, such as the immortality of the human soul or the existence of God. "In a science such as metaphysics", Kant claims in the *Beweisgrund*, "there are times when one confidently undertakes to

1 VGK XVI § 10. For a repertoire of theoretical positions relating to the relationship between philosophy and mathematics in XVII and XVIII centuries see Tonelli (1959).

2 Kant wrote to Mendelssohn on April 8, 1766: "But I cannot conceal my repugnance, and even a certain hatred, toward the inflated arrogance of whole volumes full of what are passed off nowadays as insights" (AA 10:70).

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