

Imagining Modernity

Kant's Wager on Possibility

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1.

The imagination has often been called “the faculty of possibility.” Thus was it described by Baudelaire in a famous passage of his *Aesthetic Curiosities*, where he crowned the imagination “the queen of the faculties,” and even “the queen of truth,” adding that “possibility is one of the provinces of truth.”¹ Now, if the poet could assert his modernity by loudly proclaiming an alliance between possibility, the imagination, and truth, then this was surely because Baudelaire’s profession of faith had been prepared by at least two centuries of renewed, if laborious, poetic and philosophical reflection on the faculty of possibility. The modern philosophical tradition had long maintained ambivalent ties with the imagination. Pascal repudiated it as the “mistress of error and falsehood.”² Malebranche, unable to hide his fascination with this strangest of the mind’s faculties, characterized it as “the fool who is pleased to play the fool.”³ To my eyes, the philosophy of the classical period in Germany constituted a turning point in the conception of possibility as a province of the imagination, and reciprocally, in the conception of the imagination itself as a province of possibility. This article thus examines the novel association between possibility and the imagination in Kant’s philosophy, beginning with the question of possibility and ending with the role of the imagination therein. I maintain that this association belongs to a socio-historical project, which is itself rooted in the irreducibly practical decision to foster the freedom of the subject—or better, to *wager* on the subject’s freedom to make phenomenal cognition possible. In the following pages, I will defend the thesis that in order for transcendentalism to be coherent, it must acknowledge its ultimately ‘problematic’ character and embrace this situation

by recognizing this character not as a death sentence, but as the opportunity for a new birth.

“In the beginning was the Deed.”⁴ These are the words Goethe’s Faust chooses to “translate into his dear German”⁵ from the opening of the Gospel of Saint John, as though he had had the premonition that he was about to embark on an adventure in which everything would depend on an act of freedom—an act irreducible to θεωρία alone, belonging instead to life and to force (*Kraft*). I propose to reframe Kantianism within this Faustian scene. The end of the Enlightenment saw the free establishment of a tribunal in which reason, acting as both judge and jury, critiques itself in order to break free of the arbitrary censures it had long endured (i.e., that of pure reason by empiricism as well as that of experience by classical metaphysics). I will argue that the establishment of this tribunal of reason should be recognized as an *act* that, in and of itself, constitutes a wager on freedom.

In *Faust’s* “Prologue in Heaven,” God is no longer the Leibnizian God. Goethe’s God doesn’t know whether his creatures are free or not—as Mephistopheles, the devil of negativity, points out to him.⁶ By sending Mephistopheles to test Faust in order to assess the freedom of his creatures, God inadvertently opens a space for a form of freedom that is at least *possible* for human beings. But God does not thereby create freedom *ex nihilo*. Strictly speaking, Goethe’s God does *nothing*, so that the performativity of his wager remains strictly negative. What God offers Mephistopheles—and indirectly Faust himself—is his own incompetence, his unawareness of a possible alliance within the human being between reason, freedom, and the faculty of desire (as Kant may have put it). Faust, in turn, proves unable to replace God’s ignorance with the apodictic knowledge of his own freedom; he is only able to wager on it. It thus becomes *possible* for there to be freedom within creation, and this in turn presents an opportunity for the imagination to become the formative power of human destiny.

2.

As is well known, freedom turns out to be theoretically undecidable in the Third Antinomy of the *Critique of Pure Reason*,⁷ whereas it is presented as a practical postulate in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.⁸ We can neither affirm nor refute the reality of freedom in the sphere of theoretical cognition, but we can—and even must—have recourse to our own freedom in the sphere of practical action. Indeed, Kant goes a step further by affirming the primacy of pure practical reason, whereby the latter determines not only the interest (*Interesse*) of all the forces of the mind (*Gemütskräfte*), but even its own interest (KpV 121; CPrR

237). Accordingly, “in the union of pure speculative with pure practical reason in one cognition, the latter has primacy, assuming that this union is not *contingent* and discretionary but based *a priori* on reason itself and therefore *necessary*” (ibid.). In its practical use, reason can provide no cognition besides what theoretical reason can validate; but since practical reason is accountable only to itself, the “summons” it addresses to theoretical cognition is nonetheless dictated by an interest whose necessity surpasses and eliminates any arbitrariness. When practical reason takes the initiative and makes a demand with a view to orienting theoretical reason, the former has priority on the presupposition that its demand is not gratuitous but enjoys a necessity grounded in the *a priori* demand to realize freedom. Moreover, theoretical reason as such, considered *in abstracto*, never expresses an interest, as Kant specifies further on: “all interest is ultimately practical” (KpV 121; CPR 238). Speculative reason’s dependency vis-à-vis practical reason is necessary, but this necessity itself is rooted in the postulate of freedom and, consequently, in the free interests of practical reason.

How, then, can we not acknowledge that the very act of conceiving philosophy in its entirety as a free self-critique, as a tribunal drawing on the autonomy of reason to issue a verdict on this very autonomy, already presupposes such a postulate and therefore represents an interested wager on the freedom of reason? I recognize that this reinterpretation of Kant bears the mark of Fichte and also recalls the German idealists’ characteristic strategy of making free forays into the different *Critiques*, breaking the walls separating the various Kantian jurisdictions in their pursuit of systematicity. I will suggest that the *Critique of Pure Reason* should be regarded, in retrospect, as a wager on freedom. Its strategic apparatus itself flows from Kant’s practical postulate since, from the very first line of the text, the second *Critique* shows its adherence to the audacious idea that reason *can* at least legislate freely for itself, and that it therefore has this *possibility*. Reason presupposes this ultimate possibility from the outset and only attempts to justify it after the fact. An interest of practical reason guides the critical act *par excellence*, namely the renunciation of any reference to an external point of view that might exceed reason’s free reflection on itself and thereby constitute a limit not assigned by reason to itself. To a certain degree, Kant grants this point, albeit belatedly: in the Transcendental Dialectic, he orients cognition toward the regulative horizon of practical freedom (KrV A534/B562; CPR 533–4), while in the preface to the B edition and again in the Dialectic, he invokes the interest of human beings (KrV Bxxi–xxxii; CPR 112–8; KrV B423–4; CPR 454). Although the *Critique* does not explicitly make freedom—which it problematically presupposes in its very project—a constitutive element

of theoretical cognition, it nonetheless leaves clues that its readers can glean in order to move past this aporia.

On my view, even the transcendental deduction of the categories—an abstract theoretical moment if ever there was one—is thus commanded by the practical interest of reason. The categories bespeak an independent rationality henceforth in charge of itself and free in its argumentative strategies, even though this rationality begins by proving that it cannot cognize itself in the objective mode of theoretical cognition whose boundaries it circumscribes. It is worth stressing this point today, when Kant (to his credit) still encompasses multiple epistemic perspectives in both the continental and the analytic traditions, both of which sometimes attempt to reduce the critical edifice to a particular argumentative dimension (which is then isolated or even hypostasized) without anchoring the system in an act, an attitude, or a specific process—a shift of perspective later championed by the transcendental philosophies of Fichte and Husserl.⁹

The *Critique of Pure Reason* thus constitutes an interested wager on the possibility of reason's autonomous self-examination, against the backdrop of silence, i.e., the withdrawal of any answer that might have come "from above." We must now seek to understand the connection between reason's wager and the imagination. Reason's "practical" act *ipso facto* calls for a new understanding of possibility at all levels, including the theoretical level, as well as an interpretation of Kant's novel reinvestment in the imagination as a resource for this strategy. Indeed, I cannot evoke the imagination's specific role without examining this faculty's productive and creative aspects, not only as the *result* of an historical context (which has been described countless times) but as a *participant* in a project that is inextricably epistemological and socio-historical. Through its establishment of a tribunal that is reason itself, the *Critique* "performatively" opens a new form of modernity at the zenith of the Enlightenment, radicalizing the project of the autonomy of our practical interests (or our "tendencies," as the Jena Romantics might have put it) to which theoretical reason subjects itself.

3.

In the introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes, "I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this *ought* to be possible *a priori* [*a priori möglich sein soll*]" (KrV B25; CPR 133; trans. mod.). This definition is an addition to the B edition, which appeared just before the second *Critique* and accordingly devotes greater attention to the problem of practical reason. In the corresponding passage in the A

edition, Kant was content to restrict the term “transcendental” to the *a priori* concepts of knowledge as opposed to the objects of knowledge *per se* (KrV A11; CPR 133). But in the B edition, Kant introduces a singular *Sollen* (ought): not only must our mode of cognition of objects be possible *a priori*, but it *ought* to be so. And at the opposite end of the *Critique*, in the concluding lines of the section “On the Final Aim of the Natural Dialectic of Human Reason,” which closes the “Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic,” Kant justifies the transcendental enterprise by appealing to the philosopher’s “duty” (*Pflicht*) (KrV A703/B731; CPR 623) to resist dialectical illusion, although he acknowledges the latter’s enduring “interest” (*Interesse*) (KrV A704/B732; CPR 623). Vainly would one search the entire *Critique*, whether in the nooks of the Transcendental Analytic or in the crannies of the Dialectic, for a principle more fundamental than this demand, which in a sense is both inaugural and terminal. In all of its parts, transcendental *Wissenschaft* contains a practical imperative that immediately evokes duty: to show that there *ought* to be a possibility *a priori*—itself cognizable *a priori* by the philosopher—of serving the interest of reason without being fooled by it, that is, without falling prey to dialectical illusion. To be sure, one could construe this as a properly theoretical form of freedom, one distinct from practical reason. In this vein, some scholars have emphasized the real, albeit relative, “autonomy” of cognitive judgments: the understanding’s spontaneity implies not only that it is the sole master of its own house (i.e., of its pure concepts), but also that we can fall for illusion only if theoretical judgment is fallible and thus capable of erring—a risk that in turn makes the Transcendental Dialectic indispensable. Here there is at least a hint of a negative freedom specific to the theoretical domain: “Insofar as the *Dialectic* retraces the genesis of transcendental error, it presupposes a theoretical freedom which has allowed itself to be led astray,” as Claude Piché has observed.¹⁰ But in my view, the introductory *Sollen* of the *Critique of Pure Reason* expresses a demand, prior to any theoretical autonomy, that the transcendental should itself be possible; accordingly, I see this imperative as a sign of *practical* freedom.

This practical demand is the outgrowth of an act of freedom, but since we are trying to analyze theoretical cognition here, should we not construe it as a kind of “transcendental hypothesis” in the sense that Kant gives this term in “The Discipline of Pure Reason”? Kant explains that this type of hypothesis involves employing an idea of reason (in this case, freedom) to “explain natural things” (KrV A772/B800; CPR 660; trans. mod.). Of course, this oversteps the understanding in an unacceptable manner, even though the hypothesis assumes that something is given to reason for consideration, whereas the rational

idea, considered in isolation, is a strictly “fictional” heuristic. However, the more basic question of the present analysis does not concern the explanation of natural things but only the *problematic demand* that the philosopher be *able* to give an *a priori* explanation (and thus an exposition and a deduction) of our *a priori* cognition of objects. A note from the preface to the B edition adds an important qualification:

In this Preface I propose the transformation in our way of thinking presented in the *Critique* merely as a hypothesis, analogous to that other hypothesis [viz., Copernicus’], only in order to draw our notice to the first attempts at such a transformation, which are always hypothetical, even though in the treatise itself it will be proved not hypothetically but rather apodictically from the constitution of our representations of space and time and from the elementary concepts of the understanding. (KrV Bxxii; CPR 113; trans. mod.)

This is a remarkable statement! The *Critique* cannot rely on problematic judgments (i.e., judgments whose affirmative or negative character is merely possible) to ground cognition; therefore its transformation of the way of thinking (*Denkart*) must be demonstrated apodictically. However, apodictic proof ultimately rests on a metaphysical hypothesis, which at the very least serves as a signpost. Indeed, the quoted passages from the introduction and the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic go much further than any theoretical hypothesis, as they express the demand that the hypothesis of a Copernican revolution in philosophy (not in the scientific cognition of the natural world) ought to be possible.¹¹ It seems to me that the opening of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is irreducibly problematic and furthermore that this problematicity is of a practical nature.

Does this leave us with an intrinsic arbitrariness? My view is that it does not. The condition of metaphysics at the time called for the practical decision to develop a transcendental science and even dictated its theoretical architecture, and so history’s role in this renewal must be duly recognized. Accordingly, this is not a sign of arbitrariness, but rather of *contingency*. The *a priori* structures of cognition constitutively depend on a *Sollen*—the echo of Kant’s Faustian bargain. Previously, the Leibnizian ontological framework guaranteed that there was something rather than nothing thanks to divine perfection. Kant offers no such transcendent necessity; instead, he holds that a transcendental science *ought* to be possible *a priori* for reason. The latter commands itself that this be so and assigns itself the task of providing an *a priori* account of the elements that structure our experience of a “something” that is henceforth just as contingent and precarious as the demand to account for it *a priori*.¹² Consequently, reason can only refer to the contingency of its own demand in order to find within itself the laws capable of

guaranteeing the possibility of experience. This practical imperative constitutes the *terminus a quo* of finite rationality. Since the subject *ought* to be able to find resources within herself for a free critique of her own cognition—in accordance with her interest—she must also recognize that her theoretical cognition of objects (whether ordinary or scientific) depends on this free demand, even if the experience of theoretical cognition is not itself, for Kant, an experience of freedom *per se*, since reason does not directly legislate for cognition.

4.

In the Leibnizian-Wolffian tradition, that which is non-contradictory is possible; the logical principle of non-contradiction immediately has an ontological value. But although non-contradiction remains the highest analytic principle for Kant, it tells us nothing in itself, being no more than the *conditio sine qua non* of an analytic judgment, considered independently of its content. Moreover, the principle of non-contradiction is generally contaminated by a synthesis inadvertently introduced into its classic formula, as Kant notes in the section “On the Supreme Principle of All Analytic Judgments.” Having just demonstrated the indispensability of the schematism, Kant naturally has temporal synthesis in mind when he writes: “It is impossible for something to be and not be *at the same time*” (KrV A152/B191; CPR 280). For Kant, objective or real possibility—as opposed to merely logical possibility—is what is possible in and through time. Correspondingly, Kant is willing to grant to Leibniz that a thing that does not contradict itself on the conceptual level is possible, with the proviso that when it comes to objective validity—as opposed to strictly formal validity—only a thing that does not contradict itself in time is possible. As for the supreme principle of synthetic judgments, it is nothing other than possible experience itself, conceived as the power of producing the synthetic unity of the manifold of intuition by coordinating the pure forms of sensibility with the synthesis of the imagination and with transcendental apperception. Only in accordance with these principles does Kant assert that “the conditions of the *possibility of experience* in general are at the same time conditions of the *possibility of the objects of experience*, and on this account have objective validity in a synthetic judgment *a priori*” (KrV A158/B197; CPR 283). Hence, that which is logically non-contradictory is not necessarily possible in experience. For added measure, this point is confirmed in the Analytic of Principles by the first of the “postulates of empirical thought in general”: only the phenomenon is possible (KrV A218/B265; CPR 321). For each of the categories of modality, the three postulates respectively present the different synthetic judgments that

the understanding is capable of producing *a priori* in view of the real—hence schematized—use of the categories that had previously been merely deduced in the Analytic of Concepts. The first postulate states it thus: “Whatever agrees with the formal conditions of experience (in accordance with intuition and concepts) is *possible*” (KrV A218/B265; CPR 321). Possibility takes on the revolutionary form of the phenomenon.

This certainly elucidates the relation between common or scientific cognition and possibility, as well as their relation to necessity, since we get two modalities for the price of one, so to speak. Possibility is that which meets necessary criteria. Correspondingly, *if* the necessary conditions are fulfilled (i.e., the object coheres with space, time, and the categories, and this coordination takes place at the level of the imagination and of apperception), *then* a field of possible experience can open up. Possibility is thus subject to necessity: *if* there are necessary laws, *then* there is possibility. We will return to this relation shortly, but for now, let us not lose sight of our starting point. We must bear in mind that for Kant, necessity itself—the very necessity that makes experience possible—ought to be possible for the philosopher writing the *Critique*. The general and necessary conditions of the possibility of experience *ought* themselves to be *a priori* possible *für uns* (for us)—to borrow a Hegelian phrase even though it may be infelicitous here—i.e., possible for Kant or for his readers. So, how is it *possible* for there to be *necessary* laws that themselves derivatively make experience and theoretical cognition possible? How can we cognize these necessary laws that make cognition possible? And how can we know that they are themselves possible for us *a priori*? We cannot know this only according to the rules that legitimize true cognition. Hence, the transcendental cognition of what constitutes legitimate theoretical cognition based on agreement with the formal conditions of experience itself contradicts the first postulate. When Kant demonstrates the *a priori* possibility of experience, he has no sensory experience of the principle that only sensory experience is valid, nor can he explain why it should be possible for him to transcend the conditions of the possibility of valid cognition that had been determined during the self-examination of reason.

This problem became the first focus of post-Kantian criticism. According to Schulze and Maimon, followed even more strongly by Fichte, Kant always presupposes the modern subject-object relation without treating it as a problem.¹³ Kant starts from this relation as if it were a *fact* to which he subjects the transcendental philosopher’s knowledge *nolens volens*, so to speak. Kant assumes not only that there is always a relation to the object but also that the knowing and representing subject (particularly the subject of modern science) produces propositions—whether analytic or synthetic—whose validity is simply

given. The transcendental philosopher has the task of supplying the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of judgments of experience whose validity is a fact, given that they are anchored in the fact of experience. Kant draws the conditions of possibility, i.e., the foundation, from something that he has already implicitly grounded. As a result, the foundation ultimately depends on what has been grounded and is consequently never examined *per se*, as this would be absurd. Indeed, the transcendental cognition that valid cognition depends on the relation between a sensible intuition and a concept of the understanding is never sensibly intuited by the philosopher, who voluntarily suppresses the status of her own discourse and of transcendental meta-cognition. The philosopher contents herself with legislating on the basis of what has already been settled by the “facts”; she merely has to prove its *a priori* possibility in a strictly regressive and *a posteriori* manner. While this strategy may be partially deliberate, it nonetheless leads to a number of aporias. For my part, I believe these problems should not only be recognized but also cultivated in their paradoxical fruitfulness. But what does this imply?

The irreducibly Humean core of Kantian transcendentalism—namely its reference to “empirical facts”—thus suggests an apagogic mode of proof. This was first pointed out by Maimon, who viewed a return to Hume as the only possible solution,¹⁴ and more recently by Antoine Grandjean, whose excellent analysis also brings out the richness of the Kantian strategy.¹⁵ According to Kant, the philosopher adduces indirect proofs discursively and reflexively, without producing any intuition or concept herself (in contradistinction to the mathematician, who is capable of immediately constructing her concepts in pure intuition). But in order to secure her own foundation, the philosopher must always refer to a truth that has been factually accepted elsewhere yet never proven as such.¹⁶ Thus, despite what is stated in the third rule of “The Discipline of Pure Reason,” namely that philosophical proofs “must never be *apagogic* but always *ostensive*” (i.e., they must start from a principle and derive its logical consequence directly) (KrV A789/B817; CPR 668), and despite the fact that the antinomies deceive us precisely because both the thesis and the antithesis rest on apagogic proofs, the apagogic proof nonetheless enjoys a privileged status throughout the critical discourse. There can be no denying that Kant was ambivalent about which method of proof he considered ideal. Although the third rule specifically calls for *ostensively* resolving the conflicts engendered by the ideas of reason, which are by definition cut off from any reference to possible experience, Kant nevertheless implies that the ostensive proof should be the model for the entire critical method. And yet the *Critique* only licenses the philosopher to proceed indirectly. Conversely to the ostensive

method, the apagogic proof starts from a fact or a consequence and then retraces the principle that made it possible; the principle is thus reached only indirectly.

According to the fourth section of “The Discipline of Pure Reason,” this can be done using either of two conditional inferences. Using *modus ponens*, one infers the truth of the principle from the truth of the consequence (KrV A790/B818; CPR 669). Using *modus tollens* (which Kant ultimately identifies with the apagogic proof in the strong sense), one infers the validity of the thesis negatively by demonstrating the absurdity or contradictory nature of the opposite thesis, i.e., one traces the falsity of a consequence back to the falsity of its principle in order to then justify the opposing principle (KrV A791/B819; CPR 669). In a sense, the *Critique* as a whole argues that experience would be incomprehensible if the laws it adduces were otherwise: experience would not be spatio-temporal—but that would be absurd; experience would not be structured by causality—but that would also be absurd; and so on. This *modus operandi* sometimes proceeds in a veiled way in Kant’s philosophy, but it can always be spotted at the major argumentative junctures, including in the sphere of practical philosophy. For instance, if there were no causality through freedom in addition to natural causality, then the experience of the moral law within us would be impossible; yet we do in fact have this experience of the moral law within us, which is the source of the “fact of reason” (*Faktum der Vernunft*) (see KpV 31; CPrR 164). Therefore, there must be a free causality, at least in an analogical form. The fact that the moral law arises from inside the subject with an unshakable force and is presented as a pure “fact of reason” that is *ipso facto* totally independent from “possible experience” (to which the first postulate restricted cognition in the theoretical domain) does not change the apagogic strategy; it only gives transcendental discourse a surplus of facticity in a sphere where there can be no foundation but only an exposition.

That said, there is no reason to condemn Kant’s ambiguity regarding the kind of proof he favors. As I stated above, critical reason has *de jure* no reason to pledge allegiance to any particular argumentative strategy, including the apagogic proof, since it can always start from—and come back to—*possible experience* in any way that the “tribunal of reason” (*Gerichtshof*) may deem necessary (KrV A xii; CPR 101). Indeed, Kant’s philosophical process, or the modulation of his gaze, takes precedence over any reification of an argument *per se*. For all that—and this is the crucial point—Kant provides no exemplary justification of his process, of what he himself is *doing* as he traces the contours of objective validity (using this or that argument). He does not show that philosophical reason encounters and characterizes itself, at the very least, through

the apagogic procedure; on the contrary, the Kantian discourse deliberately obscures its secret motives. Far from *practically* engendering space, time, causality, etc.—as Fichte aimed to do through his free reflection on his own philosophical activity (whereby freedom will become the sole true unconditioned principle in the *Wissenschaftslehre*)—Kant merely sets out the synthetic rules of cognition and action. He does not immediately link these rules to his own self-reflection, but rather discovers them *after the fact*, i.e., on the basis of what had been factually given. This approach is acceptable, of course, yet it is never truly justified. Transcendental rules *ought* to exist *if* the experience of nature or of morality is *given* within the human being. The connection causes significant problems in Kantianism only because it comes belatedly; it is always relative to a possible experience set outside of the philosophizing self rather than in an immediate relation to the philosophizing self. Therefore, the choice of which form of argument to employ amounts to little, insofar as it is always relative to something given to which the philosopher will establish a connection using the argument of her choosing (generally the apagogic proof) without ever really explaining the meaning of what she is doing.

In the final analysis, the only thing that is not “given” is the transcendental element itself, for the philosopher cannot include herself in her own account of valid cognition. By making the objective experience of the world or of the moral law possible, transcendental discourse always exempts itself from the procedures that it institutes to legitimize the representations that have already been instituted and tacitly assumed to be valid. This is what Grandjean calls the “factuality” of transcendental discourse, which is always “without a why.”¹⁷ However, transcendental discourse does not thereby constitute an arbitrary *petitio principii*, whether as a whole or in one of its moments. In the theoretical sphere, it rests on the conviction that the sensible factually exists as a pure multiplicity that ultimately *ought* to be unified by the powers of the understanding in order to be comprehensible, as it *de facto* is.¹⁸ But one possibility stubbornly remains as neither unthinkable nor actual: the metaphysical possibility of an incomprehensible or chaotic experience, from which we are protected only by the fact of its apparently ordered character.

This brings us to the powerful idea, aptly stressed by Grandjean, that “*actual* experience is *metaphysically contingent*.”¹⁹ One could surely say something similar in the practical domain, moreover, and assert that moral experience has a certain metaphysical contingency. But I would like to add the following point: while transcendental discourse is content to use the apagogic proof to supply the *a priori* conditions of sensible experience on the basis of its contingent actuality, this discourse, in all

of its parts (theoretical and practical), nonetheless ultimately rests on another contingency already contained in the *Critique of Pure Reason* from its very beginning—the contingency of the *act* through which transcendental discourse becomes a demand (the *Sollen* of the introduction). This demand does not pertain to the factuality of sense data even though it is just as contingent; its contingency is that of the practical demand of transcendental discourse as the guarantor of a possibility that is specifically human—i.e., no longer dependent on what is possible or impossible for God—and that is nonetheless capable of making sense.

In my view, *the contingency of this free wager on possibility is not grounded in reason; rather, it is what grounds reason*. At one extreme, we can never account for the meta-possibility we have of cognizing the necessary structures that themselves make experience possible, because we gave ourselves this possibility in an act of freedom that is in itself unconditioned and contingent. At the other extreme, we are condemned to a circle: we rely on the given in order to ground it, in turn, through our own cognitive structures. And although these structures are supposed to be strictly conditioning, we find them only by jumping from one conditioned to the next, because both the given and our own cognitive structures are equally contingent. The tribunal thus makes its ruling only on the basis of what is given to it contingently. But that's just it: the inaugural *Sollen* attests that this characterization of the given as contingency is ultimately rooted in a practical demand, an interest. But every interest of reason should be duly historicized. The interest in the present case cannot be understood independently of the socio-historical context of the Enlightenment, which called for a tribunal of reason to be established. Paradoxically though, Kant does not fully incorporate this historical dimension of reason's interests into the *Critique*, unlike the grand philosophies of history later produced by the German idealists and Romantics. At any rate, it is a free and practical choice on Kant's part to assign himself this contingency as both *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* of his transcendental philosophy.²⁰

But let me reframe these points in positive terms. The *Sollen* is certainly the unconditioned and indemonstrable foundation of an approach that in fact draws its foundation and starting point from its own contingency—although here we are dealing not with a given fact but rather with an act of freedom. Here, contingency is the accidental abyss consequent upon the Faustian God's incompetence, or if one prefers, the effect of Kant's banning the metaphysicians' principle of sufficient reason and his subjective reversal of possibility. From the *Critique of Pure Reason* onward, the Kantian *Sollen* ultimately expresses the demand that the contingency of experience provide us with an opportunity to use our equally contingent *a priori* cognitive architecture to make

meaning and forms possible—forms that are no longer considered to have been caused by God for all eternity. This *Sollen* is the wager that there may be meaning, not in spite of contingency but thanks to it; it expresses a practical interest in the *a priori* possibility of meaning even in the face of the radical contingency of experience and indeed by means of our cognitive structures' being capable of accommodating it. Although the transcendental is defined as general and necessary, this necessity is not absolute; it is always relative to a factual experience, whose contingency circularly affects transcendental discourse itself, which will never account for its own possibility.²¹

The imagination thus becomes the instrument of the (Kantian or Faustian) wager on possibility. It materializes this wager by providing possible experience with a space and a synthetic form—or rather several forms, none of which truly has a *raison d'être* and all of which are carved out by the freedom to invent oneself. After all, it was necessary in the first place to freely demand that there be possibility *a priori*. Needless to say, this thesis cannot be defended solely on the basis of the doctrinal content of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where the productive imagination is subordinated to the understanding, which itself only enjoys a relative freedom insofar as it merely thinks what intuition supplies it with according to laws (while leaving a certain amount of leeway to the power of judgment). One could, of course, give greater weight to the “free play of the faculties,” of which imagination is the orchestra conductor, as in the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, or appeal to the tension between reason and the imagination over the latter's audacious encroachment on its territory, as in the *Analytic of the Sublime*. Here I will limit myself to the first *Critique*, though I will play Kant against himself by assuming that the strictly epistemological renewal of possibility depends on a wager the consequences of which may not all be tenable but which are nonetheless operative in the critical strategy.

5.

But first, let us push the concept of possibility a bit further. As Kant explains at the beginning of the *Analytic of Concepts*, the understanding is not merely a reservoir of concepts; rather, it acts, i.e., it judges. While it is not to be confused with the power of judgment (*Urteilskraft*), its functions only become accessible to us when expressed in the form of a judgment. Given that a “function” (*Funktion*) is defined as “the unity of the action of ordering different representations under a common one” (KrV A68/B93; CPR 205), the understanding never relates immediately to the object but only to other representations (concepts or intuitions), and it must seek to unify these by determining each indeterminate

representation in a judgment. As is well known, the table of judgments provides the guiding thread for the discovery of the categories. Here I am interested only in modality, which Kant recognizes as “a quite special function of [judgments], which is distinctive in that it contributes nothing to the content of the judgment . . . but rather concerns only the value of the copula in relation to thinking in general” (KrV A74/B99–100; CPR 209). A modal judgment can be “problematic,” when the assertion or denial is considered merely *possible*; “assertoric,” when the assertion or denial is considered *actual* and thus imbued with an objective value; or “apodictic,” when the assertion or denial is *necessary*.²²

Ian S. Blecher has recently emphasized the progressive and cumulative character of the values of modal judgments (based on KrV A76/B101; CPR 209–10). He shows that while *every* judgment is always problematic, assertoric, or apodictic, the disjunction is in fact inclusive: “The problematic judgment already includes the representation that it is the first stage in a progress culminating in apodeictic judgment.”²³ The first is the *terminus a quo* of the judging activity, and the second its *terminus ad quem*, whereby the modalities are “moments [*Momente*] of thinking in general” (KrV A76/B101; CPR 210). Such a statement, of course, has no meaning strictly in terms of the logical classification of judgments, but in fact Blecher is using the Aristotelian vocabulary of “act” and “potential”: the problematic moment is a potential assertion, while the actual assertion itself has the potential for apodictic necessity, i.e., actual necessity. Blecher’s aim is not to psychologize the power of judgment’s empirical learning process—even if judgment is intrinsically connected to learning—but instead to capture the progressive character of the logical form of judgment (prior to schematization, of course).²⁴ Crucially, modality in this sense refers to the form of every judgment: the theory of formal modality is “a theory of the formal act of judging.”²⁵ In other words, modality directs our understanding of every judging activity whereby the concept of a judgment in general is described as an intrinsically modal act, as an instance that is always potentially apodictic but that, in my view, must first and foremost be actually problematic. To judge is to problematize *in view of* apodictic cognition.

But what of modality’s specific function? For the most part, the other functions of judgment literally give form to the content of the judgment, leaving an indelible mark. When one formulates a universal judgment (e.g., “All humans are mammals”), the form of quantity has an immediate effect on the content of the judgment: “all humans” and “a human” are two very different representations. The modal function of judgment, by contrast, varies the value of the copula but tells us nothing about the content of the judgment; it merely invites us to specify the position of what is being judged with respect to the thought of the subject. The

same conclusion must be drawn concerning the categories of modality formed by the following three pairs: possibility and impossibility; existence and non-existence; necessity and contingency. In the elucidation of the postulates of empirical thinking, Kant reiterates and clarifies his reasoning:

The categories of modality have this peculiarity: as a determination of the object they do not augment the concept to which they are ascribed in the least, but rather express only the relation to the faculty of cognition. If the concept of a thing is already entirely complete, I can still ask about this object whether it is merely possible, or also actual, or, if it is the latter, whether it is also necessary? No further determinations in the object itself are hereby thought; rather, it is only asked: how is the object itself (together with all its determinations) related to the understanding and its empirical use, to the empirical power of judgment, and to reason (in its application to experience)? (KrV A219/B266; CPR 322)

Predicating the possibility or the impossibility, the existence or the non-existence, the necessity or the contingency of the object of a representation—all of this points to the work of the understanding. Without adding to the determination of the object, it brings all the other categories back to their empirical use through modality. The understanding demands that all the categories really relate to experience via modality, i.e., relate to the possibility, actuality, or necessity of things, and not merely express the form of thinking analytically. For instance, the mathematical categories (quantity and quality) might have limited themselves to the latter function, were they not being constantly brought back to the empirical use of the understanding by the dynamical categories, especially modality. In the “Systematic Representation of All the Synthetic Principles of the Understanding” (the third section of the Analytic of Principles), Kant presents this remarkable passage:

In the application of the pure concepts of understanding to possible experience the use of their synthesis is either *mathematical* or *dynamical*: for it pertains partly merely to the *intuition*, partly to the *existence* of an appearance in general. The *a priori* conditions of intuition, however, are necessary throughout in regard to possible experience, while those of the existence of the objects of a possible empirical intuition are in themselves only contingent. Hence the principles of the mathematical use will be unconditionally necessary, i.e., apodictic, while the principles of the dynamical use, to be sure, also carry with them the character of an *a priori* necessity, but only under the condition of empirical thinking in an experience, thus only mediately and indirectly; consequently these do not contain the immediate evidence that is characteristic of the former (though their universal certainty in relation to experience is not thereby injured). (KrV A160–1/B199–200; CPR 284)

The synthetic use of the categories of quantity and of quality is mathematical insofar as it conditions intuition as such. The synthetic use of the categories of relation and of modality is dynamical insofar as it bears only on the existential position of what is judged. The mathematical principles are necessary, according to Kant, because without them intuition (including pure intuition) would simply not be possible. The dynamical principles are contingent, since when they are applied—and by definition they are not necessarily applied, as they first require an empirical sensation—they certainly coordinate *a priori* with the sensible material supplied by intuition, but without adding anything to their objective determination. They produce only a mediate and discursive appraisal according to the empirical modulation of the position of existence. The same goes for the categories of relation: the use of causality only yields “analogies of experience,” as Kant explains in the section of the same name, which allow one to say how the thing one is judging is causally connected in time to A, B, or C, as regards its existence but not with respect to its pure intuitive possibility.

For Kant, heir to the *mathesis universalis* of modernity, mathematics always represents the path of knowledge, as it always tells us what we can cognize about things *a priori*, independently of the question of their existence (by anticipating the very form of the appearance to be intuited according to its extension and intension), but not independently of sensibility, of course, since we are dealing with transcendental categories rather than the categories of formal logic. Thus, according to Kant, the mathematical categories enjoy apodictic evidence, yet the latter remains relative to possible experience.

The understanding does not give up its synthetic function in the case of the dynamical categories; however, it limits itself to subjectively synthesizing the concept with an existential position tied to its empirical use yet without synthesizing the object itself. Because relation and modality introduce some leeway into the configuration of the representation’s meaning, the subject is called upon to always remember that it is anchored in the understanding, since the object does not dictate its own existential position. In the “Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic,” Kant confirms what he had already subtly alluded to in KrV A179/B222; CPR 297–8: he goes so far as to make the dynamical principles of the understanding strictly regulative, in contradistinction to the mathematical principles, which are fully constitutive. To be sure, he also specifies that while the dynamical laws are merely regulative with respect to *intuition*, they are no less constitutive of *experience* as such, since at the very least “they make possible *a priori* the *concepts* without which there is no experience” (KrV A664/B692; CPR 602), even though

they do not make intuition possible, but rather endow it with a surplus of meaning.

6.

If Fichte was Kant's Mephistopheles in that he forced negativity to fully unite with rationality well beyond the *Critique*, I will now try surreptitiously to manipulate Kant in a relatively Fichtean spirit. To put it plainly: I will play with the effacement—or ambiguity, depending on one's point of view—of the status of Kant's discourse in order to assess the paradoxical fruitfulness of his approach with respect to the question of possibility in the sense I have developed here, i.e., in its ambivalence.²⁶ Earlier I asked how it might be possible *a priori* for necessity—the *a priori* structures that make cognition possible—to itself be possible “for us”? We do not know, since transcendental discourse—which is contingent and without a “why,” yet it is summoned by the practical demand that its *a priori* possibility be capable of having objective validity—eludes every explanation according to the mode of cognition that it itself makes possible and legitimate.²⁷ But can we not apply Kant's discourse to himself? By jumping from conditioned to conditioned without ever attaining a foundation grounded elsewhere—unless it is in the hypothetical *Sollen* of the introduction that Kant plays close to his chest—can we not force him to admit that the *Critique* is problematic in its entirety, that its assertions about the conditions of possible cognition (contained in the first postulate of empirical thinking) are themselves only possible?

Recall the passage cited above (KrV A160–1/B199–200; CPR 284): using this circularity, which Fichte will later deem vicious,²⁸ but which we know is inevitable in the *Critique*, Kant applied the categories to themselves, as if they were already valid, in order to ground their synthetic use in the Analytic of Principles. Thus he affirmed both that the mathematical principles of their synthetic use were necessary and therefore possessed an apodictic content, and that the dynamical principles of their synthetic use were contingent (even though the categories have an indirect *a priori* necessity in cases where their strictly subjective synthesis operates—an operation that is entirely relative to the empirical use of the understanding and therefore is arbitrary). But the necessity and the contingency directing the two synthetic uses of the categories are, of course, the modal categories, i.e., the dynamical categories that yield a discursive and mediated cognition of the existence of objects in experience, which they are content to regulate rather than constitute (according to the “Appendix to the Transcendental Deduction”). Consequently, even the necessary mathematical principles nonetheless attest, at their meta-level,

to a kind of modality that is meant not to determine the least content of a judgment but only to regulate it and to vary the meaning of the copula at the subject's discretion. Some Kantians will no doubt find this absurd. Not without reason, to be sure, since there is a risk of plunging transcendental philosophy into skepticism, which Kant always repudiated. Nonetheless, the Kantian difficulty is a fruitful one.

The dynamical principles do not concern the construction of the object *qua* magnitude, as the mathematical principles do; rather, they concern the object's existence, either insofar as the latter is inserted into the totality of nature (as in the "Analogies of Experience") or in direct relation to the subject of the judgment (as in "The Postulates of Empirical Thought in General"). But by specifying the domain of application of *all* the principles *in terms of modality*, could it be that Kant wants to suggest, in a roundabout way, that every one of these synthetic principles of the understanding—even the mathematical principles—only has validity relative to the ultimate *possibility* that something should give itself as an existence to be judged, and also that the conditions of the possibility of its being given could be provided *a priori*? Kant does not seem to be able to guarantee this possibility to his reader, since in the *Critique of Pure Reason* he presented it as a wager. Accordingly, subjectivity might secretly be invited to act *as if* all the synthetic principles relate to existence, at times in an apodictic mode (mathematically), and at other times in a problematic mode (dynamically), while knowing full well that even apodicticity has an "as if" and therefore regulative status. As a modality, this apodicticity is no more than an extension of the inaugural problematicity, since the categories of modality, being contingent, regulate *every use* of the categories. Why? Surely because the origin of transcendental philosophy as such has itself been hypothetically demanded, and there is literally "no reason" for Kant to substitute an ultimate necessity for the hypothesis that transcendental philosophy, indeed a transcendental world, *ought to be possible*.

That we should now be approaching the limit of absurdity is a consequence of the pact signed by Kant—and by all of classical German philosophy after him—with the devil of negativity, Mephistopheles: by substituting an *a priori* possibility for the *Schulmetaphysik's* principle of sufficient reason, they run up against the possibility of the impossible—the possibility of losing the transcendental wager. Giving up the principle of sufficient reason means welcoming a transcendental philosophy whose possibility, without a "why," must become the object of a belief—like the God of the old metaphysics.²⁹ The God of German metaphysics, like the God of Goethe's "Prologue in Heaven," has withdrawn himself by default, by the absence of a response, and not because one could immediately speak the language of necessity in place of the traditional

God (as Spinoza does, for example). This would amount to short-circuiting the inexplicable contingency of a possibility, which *must* be possible since the tribunal of reason, surprised by its unforeseen powers, wagers on its own possibility, making the *Critique* entirely problematic rather than apodictic. At least the free *choice* of the problematicity or apodicticity of the critical discourse is left to the discretion of the philosopher who deploys her freedom in transcendentalism.

Here it is quite difficult for Kant not to overburden the contract with skepticism and negativity already signed by Descartes a century and a half earlier, but which is now radicalized as never before in modernity. Not all *a priori* lawfulness can be necessary—and thereby open the field of possible experience to common or scientific consciousness—without first being possible, or having to be possible, for the philosopher who seeks to account for it *a priori* and who wishes to accommodate this meta-possibility in its contingency without determining it “from above” and thereby eliminating it. The *Critique* must be repaired, or have a verdict issued on it, using the elements of its own transcendental theory, which turn out to be already conditioned by the wager of their *a priori* possibility—which, in other words, turn out to be ultimately contingent, problematic, and even regulative. Hence Kant uses the categories that he assumes to be valid in order to validate their usage. While the *a priori* necessity of the categories is itself relative “from below” to possible experience and is therefore hypothetical (as Kant notes in the third of the Postulates of Empirical Thought in General),³⁰ it is also relative “from above” to the very possibility of the *a priori* cognition of the philosopher who demands, in virtue of the *Sollen*, that it be thus.

Surprised by her new powers, the philosopher still proves able to discriminate between possible and impossible cognition, and thereby between possible and impossible objects. The enigma no longer consists in knowing *why* there is something rather than nothing, but rather in determining *how* possible cognition (i.e., cognition corresponding to the first postulate) and impossible cognition (which does not correspond to this postulate and deludes itself, i.e., metaphysical discourse) can both be subjected to the critical point of view and be possible for the transcendental philosopher. The “Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection,” which closes the Transcendental Analytic, enjoins Kant—who, in writing the *Critique* itself, has *de facto* already transcended the only cognition he regards as valid (cognition of phenomena)—to make good use of his “reflection” (*Überlegung*) in order to assign diverse representations to their places without making mistakes and to prevent any confusion between the empirical and transcendental uses of the understanding (KrV A260–4/B316–20; CPR 366–8). Such a confusion is natural, since the object in general calls for the distinction between the possible object

and the impossible object. To repeat, the surprise is no longer that there is something instead of nothing, since there is always an object for the tribunal tasked with issuing a verdict on what is given to it, that is, when reason reflexively scrutinizes its immanent conditions of possibility. Rather, the surprise is that this object may be either possible—and can therefore constitute a “something”—or impossible, in which case it becomes one of the forms of the concept of “nothing.”

Since it is no longer God who decides what is possible or impossible, the Kantian tribunal *demands* via the inaugural *Sollen* that this power rightfully devolve to itself; yet it also *receives* this deciding power passively, in a completely accidental manner. Testing a freedom without precedent in modernity, the tribunal receives a propaedeutic aid in the form of the “table of nothing” that closes the “Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection” and the Transcendental Analytic by presenting the problematic object as the sole guiding thread for transcendental reflection:

The highest concept with which one is accustomed to begin a transcendental philosophy is usually the division between the possible and the impossible. But since every division presupposes a concept that is to be divided, a still higher one must be given, and this is the concept of an object in general (taken problematically, leaving undecided whether it is something or nothing). Since the categories are the only concepts that relate to objects in general, the distinction of whether an object is something or nothing must proceed in accordance with the order and guidance of the categories. (KrV A290/B346; CPR 382)

The object in general must therefore always be considered, in the first instance, in its problematic character, and thus we can say retrospectively that it must reach the imagination when the latter institutes the phenomenal order. If this amphibological reflection, which is posterior and so to speak optional, rules on the possible or impossible status of an ultimately problematic object, must not the imagination confront problematicity? To be sure, as the faculty of the possible but not of the impossible, the imagination cannot give life, so to speak, to the four objects of the “table of nothing.” They cannot be phenomenalized because the two ends of the synthetic chain of the “subjective deduction” of the A edition—apprehension in intuition and recognition in the concept (KrV Axvii; CPR 103)—always fall short in one way or another. The imagination thus has no constructive synthesis to offer: it cannot make that which is absent persist by reproducing it in the present if there hasn’t been a primordial presence behind the absence. Whatever the differences between the two editions of the *Critique* (interpreted countless times since the famous Davos debate between Heidegger and Cassirer), it can be agreed that the productive imagination is not cre-

ative in the sphere of theoretical cognition. Neither is it creative in the sphere of possible experience—as it must first be given a manifold of intuition consolidated into a synoptic view—nor *a fortiori* in the experience of impossible objects, i.e., in the sphere of impossible experience. Moreover, the imagination obviously has nothing to schematize in the case of the four figures of “nothing.” Only possible experience is the first *effect* of the imagination and of the formal synthesis of self-consciousness, i.e., transcendental apperception (as emphasized in the B edition). As Kant explains in his presentation of the table of categories, this is so because synthesis in general *is* “the mere effect of the imagination, of a blind though indispensable function of the soul, without which we would have no cognition at all, but of which we are seldom even conscious” (KrV A78/B103; CPR 211).

Thus, the transcendental imagination of the first *Critique* only represents the capacity of shaping the contingency that it receives and that it does not truly account for, at least not in the Leibnizian sense of a sufficient reason. At the zenith of the German Enlightenment, Kant grants the imagination the power not to eliminate contingency but on the contrary to take advantage of the *occasion* of contingency in order to ensure the synthetic unity demanded by subjectivity and thereby to generate forms, figures, and ultimately meaning. But why is the imagination not creative at the theoretical level? To be sure, the imagination is productive—one could even say constructive—in the theoretical sphere. Already in mathematics it *constructs* the concept prescribed by the understanding in intuition, and it does not cease constructing in this way elsewhere, if one grants that temporalizing is equivalent to constructing the synthetic unity of understanding and intuition. Nonetheless, something must be given to it “from below” (by pure or empirical intuition) and “from above” (a prescription issued by the understanding). But this twofold given—the sensation and the prescription—is not created by the imagination. The different figures of “nothing” are strictly speaking unimaginable; they embody the external limit of contingency in the theoretical context. They are unknowable, to be sure, but not unthinkable for the philosopher, in whose eyes these impossible figures are, so to speak, the deposit, or relic, of the initial wager on possibility. This is why, for the great majority of commentators, it is only in the third *Critique* that the imagination will become not only creative, but also free.³¹ More generally, and notably since Manfred Riedel’s work,³² Kantianism has often been retroactively reconstructed from the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. While it is not possible to incorporate the latter text here, I will conclude by plumbing the depth of the wager on possibility solely with the resources that Kant had at his disposal in the first *Critique*.

7.

I have described the inaugural wager of the critical enterprise and the intrinsically problematic establishment of a tribunal commensurate to this task, which assigns itself the object in general, i.e., the problematic object, as its first object. And here is my hypothesis, which flows from a “critical heuristic,” so to speak, rather than from a strict evaluation of Kant’s doctrine: the wager, the establishment of the tribunal, and the problematic object *belong to the imagination* as a problematic faculty, or rather as the power of problematizing practical freedom at the very point where it devotes itself to theoretical cognition. This freedom is always problematic, for it is situated between two contingencies: a contingency “from above,” since the freedom of reason examining itself is the subject of a demand—a wager, in fact, that reason cannot account for as such but must on the contrary use as a basis for establishing itself as a tribunal; and a contingency “from below,” since the *a priori* rules that structure cognition but that were first made possible by this hypothetical freedom take advantage of multiple facticities that were simply *given* before being *grounded*. Correspondingly, epistemology is called upon to act *as if* its assertions were true, whereas their “truth” is first and foremost an extension of possibility.³³ Can the imagination serve as the instrument of a problematic freedom, providing the latter with the reflexive strategy it needs (the tribunal) and the equivocal object that must be freely judged?

Supporting this hypothesis is the proposal by Fichte’s Romantic students to employ the imagination, intimately tied to practical reason, to “plasticize” (*plastisieren*)³⁴ all the elements of the transcendental theory as if they intimately belonged to it. Through modality, all the categories would thus become “liquid” (*flüssig*),³⁵ to use the forceful expression of Ernst Bloch, who drew inspiration from Friedrich Schlegel’s lectures on logic (delivered in Cologne in 1805–1806) to elaborate his conception of utopia.³⁶ The modality at issue in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, according to Schlegel, does not really have to do with categoriality insofar as it does not determine the object but rather signals the involvement of the understanding restrained to its empirical use.³⁷ For Schlegel, if the “determination of the representation [*Vorstellung*] can progress to infinity,”³⁸ it is also because judgment and its underlying categories are always potentially apodictic, in the sense that this apodicticity is at bottom always transitory and constantly brought back to a problematic status. Indeed, the entire schematism of the imagination belongs to a modality that has no category, as every schema always presents itself as a “transposition of the possible onto the real.”³⁹ The schema adds nothing to the content of the concepts it renders sensible but merely

gives them a transitory objective validity in virtue of its capacity to make possible a determination of the object by the categories. Keeping to the edge of possibility, the schema represents the infinite, ultimately contingent power to modulate the thought of a given that is itself ultimately contingent. Such a power even makes Kant uncharacteristically lyrical. In his “Reflections on Anthropology,” in which he comments on Wolff, Tetens, and Baumgarten, while simultaneously constructing his own critical system, Kant writes: “Idealism of phenomena: we are partly their creators depending on the standpoint [*Standpunkt*] we adopt. Poet(s) [*Dichter*].”⁴⁰ Although these “Reflections” foreshadow the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* more than the *Critique of Pure Reason* itself, one can also grant the schematism a poetic function in the *Critique*. To be sure, the imagination does not have a creative function in the strong sense, but it does *invent* rules—operational methods that enable the application of the categories insofar as the schema always has the potential for such an application to sensible experience and thus has a thoroughly “possibilizing” power.

The interdependence, the kinship, indeed the virtual identity between the schematism and modality—understood as the never-completed translation of possibility to actuality and then to necessity—is not sufficient, of course. The inaugural *Sollen* of the *Critique of Pure Reason* would have to be allied with the imagination from the outset: reason ought to be able to discover the freedom on which it chose to wager (practically demanding an *a priori* theoretical self-knowledge) and recognize it as its own phenomenalization. Needless to say, the third *Critique* could not have been of any decisive help here, since it is not a matter of finding *clues* to the compatibility between rational freedom and nature, but rather of *grounding* all types of judgment in the freedom demanded by the *Sollen*. What is schematized by the imagination, on this view, is freedom itself, or more precisely, the wager on freedom: finite reason’s *demand* for an unconditioned freedom would thus be phenomenalized. The imagination would be the self-schematization of the *ought-to-be* of freedom, conceived as a perpetual poetic or “poietic” translation, or transposition, from possibility to actuality and then to necessity. The real, or actual, is nothing other than problematic freedom fixed by the imagination into a certain form, against the background of a multiplicity of fluid, transitory forms to which we adhere through belief. Moreover, if what we experience is indeed the imagination’s phenomenalization of a freedom that is demanded and believed, that freedom still depends on a contingent given, and so there is no reason to fear a solipsistic disconnection from the world. This freedom is not that of a *res cogitans* imprisoned within its representations, but that of a *correlation*, i.e., a *relation* between, on the one hand, the act by which the tribunal of the *Critique*—

and, in the final analysis, of consciousness itself—establishes itself as free *and*, on the other, the multiple portfolios to be judged, which the tribunal welcomes as *its* alterities each time it makes a ruling on them using its problematic powers, or forms them through the imagination.

The difficulty is to successfully decompartmentalize the imagination and the superior faculty of reason that, according to the introduction, assigns itself its own problematic tribunal. But if I can be granted that theoretical reason grounds itself in the free act of practical reason, at least theoretical reason recognizes the rational idea (albeit belatedly, in the “Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic”) as a particular kind of “schema,” or rather as “an analogue of a schema of sensibility,” which aims to systematically unify empirical cognition (KrV A665/B693; CPR 602). In an important article devoted to the “fictions of pure reason,” as he calls them, Claude Piché has perfectly characterized both Kant’s tentative openness to the schematism of reason as well as the limits of any such association.⁴¹ In general, we know the ideas, including the idea of an unconditioned freedom—which, as I have argued, *establishes* the tribunal, *conducts* the trials, and invariably *constitutes* knowledge in its very problematicity—only through their faulty use, analyzed in the Dialectic. In the practical domain, reason is absolutely productive, immediately imposing its law (as well as its interest) on the will. In the theoretical domain, reason must nevertheless *produce* these analogues of the schema. Of course, the ideas are the residues of syllogisms, which by definition can produce neither new cognitions nor *a fortiori* new objects, at least not objects of possible experience. Indeed, transcendental illusion arises when a syllogism is fallaciously directed toward such a goal. An idea of reason (*focus imaginarius*, as Kant puts it [KrV A644/B672; CPR 591]) is nonetheless produced thereby, and Piché has endeavored to show “how reason engenders its schema even before the latter is dogmatically interpreted as a real object.”⁴² In the case of the Paralogisms, for example, the representation of the self as the synthetic unity of apperception permits reason to act *as if* this thinking self, arrived at by abstraction, were a separate, really existing entity: the soul. But the regulating abstraction is not a real separation or isolation (*Absonderung*). While reason may well provide the “I” of classical psychology with the analogue of a schema, it must be careful not to hypostasize it as an independently subsisting object. Hypostasizing is itself an act of fabulation; reason only falls prey to this error because it neglects to ask itself if the concept it has produced has an object. But at least this concept has the *analogon* of a schema.

This will still not suit my purpose so long as a practical imperative really governs theoretical reason by its very performativity, whereby reason’s wager occupies the space left vacant by the God of *Schulmetaphysik*

and immediately engages the imagination as the power of occupying the “nothing,” which is thereby open to possibility but always only *potentially* realizable. In the third section of “The Discipline of Pure Reason,” devoted to the proper conduct of reason with regard to the hypotheses framed by the imagination, we read:

Insofar as the imagination ought [*soll*] not to simply *enthuse* [*schwärmen*] but rather to *invent* [*dichten*] under the strict oversight of reason, something must also first be fully certain and not invented, or a mere opinion, and that is the *possibility* of the object itself. (KrV A770/B798; CPR 659; trans. mod.)

This is also the condition for a valid hypothesis in Kant’s sense: the imagination can contribute to forming an opinion—i.e., a cognition that is fallible but has the potential for apodicticity—only based on the conditions of the possibility of the object. On the one hand, Kant elevates the imagination to a novel function in modernity, but on the other hand, he binds it to possibility; it becomes a province of possibility and, more precisely, a province of freedom. Ultimately, we encounter the inaugural *Sollen* again, as Kant issues a verdict on the hypothesis in a hypothetical form: *if* it is to contribute to cognition, the imagination *ought to* (*soll*) be able to invent, yet without falling into the *Schwärmerei* analyzed long ago in the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, which Kant regards as a crucial anthropological reality, but one which is divorced from science.⁴³ Thus he adds:

we also cannot conceive of . . . presence except in space [or of] duration except merely in time. In a word: it is only possible for our reason to use the conditions of possible experience as conditions of the possibility of things; but it is by no means possible for it as it were to create [*schaffen*] new ones, independent of these conditions, for concepts of this sort, although free of contradiction, would nevertheless also be without any object. (KrV A770–1/B798–9; CPR 659)

This should all be clear by now. But that transcendental discourse as such *ought to* be possible *a priori* (as in the introduction) is a possibility that the philosopher has to grant herself in a circular manner through the imagination. The real or objective cooperation between the *Sollen* and the imagination, however, presupposes a practical schematism, which the second *Critique* completely disavows. The demand that freedom be intrinsically unconditioned yet nonetheless open to being phenomenalized—and hence made finite—by the imagination may well correspond to the first article of the “constitution” of which Fichte became the guardian, to use Novalis’ famous formulation from the *Logological Fragments*.⁴⁴ A hypothesis framed by the imagination distinguishes itself from *Schwärmerei* when it deliberately embraces the very form of our *a priori* cognitive structures, i.e., the form of possible experience. But it was

first necessary to wager on the very possibility of transcendental discourse as the *necessary* form of all *possible* reflection. Furthermore, this “categorical hypothesis,” so to speak, presupposes that an unconditioned freedom can be schematized through the finite reflection of the philosopher who has wagered on it, and the imagination thereby has the task of always establishing a relation between the conditioned and the unconditioned.

The hypothesis that transcendental discourse, just like a utopia, *ought to be*—whereby οὐ-τόπος refers to a place that does not exist but that does not entail an exit from our spatial condition—constitutes the prospective imperative of transcendentalism. This is a Faustian wager, since in its finite condition the imagination only ever turns “something” into an image when it obeys the understanding’s command to “form” a given. What the imagination turns into an image is “nothing” when Kant, according to the pure freedom suggested by the *Sollen*, schematizes the possibility of this freedom by writing the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The latter presents itself as a transcendental fiction whose problematic character must, paradoxically, be deemed “constitutive” insofar as it is all that we “have.” Ultimately, the only experience we have is always a problematic one. This is not to say that the “promised land,” so to speak, of transcendentalism is merely a distant regulative idea: the world that we have to offer here is in a sense far worse than a world oriented only by such an idea, since we could just as well *choose* to read transcendentalism as an apodictic discourse. Indeed, such is the freedom of the philosophizing subject who commits herself to transcendentalism and who shifts the meaning of the copula “is” on the basis of a hypothetical “ought-to-be.” Rather, “the promised land of transcendentalism,” in the very problematicity of the wager on its existence, represents our only “constitution”—one that by its definition is always subject to perpetual revision. This potentially apodictic constitution is nothing: not in the sense of the *ens rationis* (the noumenon), but perhaps in the sense of the *nihil privativum*, the “real effect = 0” of opposing forces. The opposing forces here are, on the one hand, freedom asserted unconditionally by the *Sollen*, and on the other, all the forms and finite products that this same freedom generates when it reflects on itself and phenomenizes itself through the transcendental imagination. This comparison of the transcendental constitution, or critical fiction, with the *nihil privativum* is, of course, provisional, since the latter designates an object,⁴⁵ whereas what I have in mind is an *act*—an act of freedom indissociable from the imagination through which it establishes itself problematically. This “nothing” is irreducible to the level of objectivity; it instead makes possible this level of objectivity, although its own unconditioned possibility can never be proven or

demonstrated.⁴⁶ The “nothing” is thus the capacity to act of a problematic freedom, which at least makes possible a problematic world—one that must thus always be imagined.⁴⁷

NOTES

I dedicate this article to Claude Piché. I also wish to express my heartfelt thanks to Charlotte Sabourin (McGill University) for her attentive reading of this article and for the enriching discussions we have had about it, as well as to Adam Westra (Université de Montréal and Champlain College) for his editorial help. Of course, this does not commit them to my interpretation or to any of the risks I take here.

1. Charles Baudelaire, *Curiosités esthétiques*, vol. 2 of *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jacques Crépet (Paris: Louis Conard, 1923), pp. 274–5; all translations of this text are my own.
2. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi, ed. Anthony Levi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 16.
3. Nicolas Malebranche, *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*, trans. David Scott, ed. Nicholas Jolley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 4.
4. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: The First Part of the Tragedy*, in *Faust: The First Part of the Tragedy with the Unpublished Scenarios for the Walpurgis Night and the Urfaust*, trans. John R. Williams (Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth, 1999); *Faust: Der Tragödie erster Teil*, in *Dramatische Dichtungen I*, ed. Erich Trunz, vol. 3 of *Dramatische Dichtungen*, vols. 3–5 of *Goethes Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe*, ed. Erich Trunz et al. (Hamburg: Christian Wegner, 1948), line 1237.
5. *Ibid.*, lines 1222–3; trans. mod.
6. *Ibid.*, lines 300–9.
7. For the A edition, see Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft (1781)*, ed. Benno Erdmann, in vol. 4 of *Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Dilthey, vols. 1–9 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Prussian Academy of the Sciences (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1911), A448–451; for the B edition, see *Kritik der reinen Vernunft (1787)*, ed. Benno Erdmann, vol. 3 of *Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Dilthey, vols. 1–9 of *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1911), B476–479; henceforth KrV, followed by edition letter and page number; *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 486–9; henceforth CPR, followed by page number.
8. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, ed. Paul Natorp, in vol. 5 of *Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Dilthey, vols. 1–9 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Prussian Academy of the Sciences (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1913), pp. 110–48; henceforth KpV, followed by page number; *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed.

Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 228–58; henceforth CPrR, followed by page number.

9. As Sebastian Gardner has argued, transcendentalism is not merely a compromise between empiricism and rationalism. Adopting the transcendental turn, he argues, amounts to a fundamental “change of paradigm” (see his “Introduction: The Transcendental Turn,” in *The Transcendental Turn*, ed. Sebastian Gardner and Matthew Grist [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015], p. 14). Arguments play a role in paradigm changes, but they fundamentally depend on a change of *attitude*, on a specific attention to *what* is being established and *how*. It is worth noting, Gardner suggests, that “‘transcendental arguments’ cannot be singled out purely on the basis of their form and the characteristic topic of their premises; in other words, in order to *follow* such arguments or proofs, attention to more than the deductive structure of their discursive presentation is required” (ibid.).
10. Claude Piché, *Kant et ses épigones: Le jugement critique en appel* (Paris: Vrin, 1995), p. 45; all translations of this text are my own. Piché goes on to specify that the determination of an object of cognition is not an automatic process, “for then there would remain no room for error, whereas the latter is a sign, at the very least, that theoretical freedom is at work” (p. 70).
11. Moreover, a connection can be made between the hypothesis and reflective judgment, as many commentators have noted, even if the first obeys a top-down schema that is not exactly similar to the free elaboration of the universal from the singular case as in the *bona fide* reflective process. On this topic, see Suma Rajiva, “Is Hypothetical Reason a Precursor to Reflective Judgment?,” *Kant-Studien* 97:1 (2006), pp. 114–26.
12. Reconstructing the project of the *Critique of Pure Reason* on the basis of a specific *Sollen*, construed as not merely ornamental but indeed as constitutive of the enterprise, is certainly far removed from any orthodox position. Yet it is striking to see that some scholars working in a strictly Kantian vein are developing the possibility of a “critical” access to a certain form of the condition of the possibility of transcendental discourse itself. This condition of possibility sometimes becomes simply transcendent, but not in the sense of an ontological transcendence (which would amount to dogmatically positing the existence of an intelligible world through the *Critique*). For instance, Thérèse Pentzopoulou-Valalas evokes an “*a priori* formal transcendence,” the defining characteristic of which is to always go beyond the element that is set in relation to something else without being able to achieve its synthesis; whereas transcendental discourse cannot justify this possibility itself, since it derives from this possibility (see her “Transcendant ontologique et transcendant logique dans la théorie de la connaissance de Kant,” in *Kant et la science: La théorie critique et transcendantale de la connaissance*, ed. Sophie Grapotte, Mai Lequan, and Margit Ruffing [Paris: Vrin, 2011], p. 283; my trans.). This strategy—showing that the mechanism of synthesis presupposes the possibility (never fully acknowledged by Kant) of simply “leaving” the concept to be combined—certainly makes sense, but it does not at all help us escape from the *regressus ad infinitum*: How is the power of “transcending” itself possible? For my part, I favor a position prior to unconditioned freedom, which merely demands that transcendental discourse itself be

- possible at its own risk, since the latter never ceases to have a problematic status.
13. See my essay “La métaphysique et l’intérêt pratique chez Kant: Remarques sur la transition vers la systématique idéaliste,” *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 55:4 (2016), pp. 759–89.
 14. See, for example, Solomon Maimon, *An Autobiography*, trans. and ed. J. Clark Murray (London: Alexander Gardner, 1888), p. 284.
 15. See Antoine Grandjean, *Critique et réflexion: Essai sur le discours kantien* (Paris: Vrin, 2009); all translations of this text are my own.
 16. This constant reference to “facts” has been largely accepted in the secondary literature on Kant. For instance, in his treatment of the regressive transcendental argument, Karl Ameriks holds that the transcendental deduction of the categories should be regarded “as moving from the assumption that *there is* empirical knowledge to a proof of the preconditions of that knowledge” (“Kant’s Transcendental Deduction as a Regressive Argument,” in *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason: Critical Essays*, ed. Patricia Kitcher [Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998], p. 85; emphasis added). Dieter Henrich also recognizes the preeminence of the *Faktum*, but he attempts to interpret it as “a juridical fact (or an action)” that is as such freed from the burden of the *questio facti*, since the fact already has a *de jure* form. Such is his position, more or less, developed over the course of an enlightening inquiry into Kant’s recourse to the juridical sphere, which I nevertheless do not wholeheartedly accept. According to Henrich, the deductions “can never be given without reference to the facts from which our knowledge originates. We cannot arrive at, and don’t need a comprehensive understanding of, the genesis and constitution of these facts in themselves. Yet we must arrive at an understanding of the aspects of them that suffice to justify the claims attached to our knowledge. Most of the facts the deductions rely upon are basic operations of our reason” (“Kant’s Notion of a Deduction and the Methodological Background of the First *Critique*,” in *Kant’s Transcendental Deductions: The Three Critiques and the Opus postumum*, ed. Eckart Förster [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989], p. 37).
 17. Grandjean, *Critique et réflexion*, p. 169.
 18. For a comparison of Kant and Husserl on this point, see Julia Jansen, “Transcendental Philosophy and the Problem of Necessity in a Contingent World,” in *On the Transcendental*, special issue of *Metodo: International Studies in Phenomenology and Philosophy* 1:1 (2015), pp. 47–80.
 19. Antoine Grandjean, “Déduire les catégories: Argument, chemins et pré-supposés,” in *Lectures de Kant*, ed. Michaël Fœssel and Pierre Osimo (Paris: Ellipses, 2010), p. 112; all translations of this text are my own.
 20. In my view, this mitigates the problem of freedom as a mere *terminus ad quem*, as the result or external limit of theoretical reasoning in the first *Critique*. Kant, it is often said, certainly demonstrated the possibility of freedom by default, but not its actuality (*Wirklichkeit*). As Bernd Ludwig has noted, however, it cannot even be said that Kant proved the logical

possibility of the concept of freedom in 1781. Indeed, Kant does not really need to affirm that this concept is non-contradictory *per se*, given that the conflict and/or contradiction arises only in relation to natural causality in the antinomy of pure reason. In fact, Kant proves as early as the first *Critique* that freedom has a real possibility *as long as there is no conflict with the natural order*. But one still cannot show how freedom is possible; its objective reality is practically necessary. See Bernd Ludwig, “Die *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* hat die Wirklichkeit der Freiheit nicht bewiesen, ja nicht einmal deren Möglichkeit’: Über die folgenreiche Fehlinterpretation eines Absatzes in der *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*,” *Kant-Studien* 106:3 (2015), p. 406.

21. This is evidenced by the following exemplary passage from the *Analytic of Concepts* (in the B edition): “But for the peculiarity of our understanding, that it is able to bring about the unity of apperception *a priori* only by means of the categories and only through precisely this kind and number of them, a further ground [*Grund*] may be offered just as little as one can be offered for why we have precisely these and no other functions for judgment or for why space and time are the sole forms of our possible intuition” (KrV B 145–6; CPR 254). See also Kant’s letter to Marcus Herz from May 26, 1789, which offers a response to Maimon’s objections (Immanuel Kant to Marcus Herz, 26 May, 1789, Letter 362, in *Correspondence*, trans. and ed. Arnulf Zweig [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], pp. 311–6).
22. Ever since Giorgio Tonelli’s important article on the Kantian tables’ roots in the logic textbooks of the eighteenth century, we know that one of the specificities of the table of judgments turns out to be that its articulation—largely of Kant’s own devising—presents modal judgments as means for situating or critiquing skepticism and dogmatism: the problematic judgment corresponds to the skeptical attitude; assertoric judgments correspond to the dogmatic attitude; and the apodictic judgment corresponds to the *a priori* judgments made by dogmatism. These terms did not explicitly refer to *modalities* before 1781. See Giorgio Tonelli, “Die Voraussetzungen zur Kantischen Urteilstafel in der Logik des 18. Jahrhunderts,” in *Kritik und Metaphysik: Heinz Heimsoeth zum achtzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Friedrich Kaulbach and Joachim Ritter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1966), p. 150.
23. Ian S. Blecher, “Kant on Formal Modality,” *Kant-Studien* 104:1 (2013), p. 54.
24. Needless to say, this is not a temporal progression, but rather the functioning of the pure understanding independently of its future schematization.
25. Blecher, “Kant on Formal Modality,” p. 61.
26. As Grandjean has argued in *Critique et réflexion*, it may be inappropriate to expect the Kantian discourse to satisfy the requirements that it sets out for valid cognition, since it deliberately obscures the “place” from which the philosopher speaks. However, other Kantian scholars draw the opposite conclusion, as, for example, Claude Piché does. He writes: “The conditions of the possibility of experience are equally valid for the transcendental discourse that brings them to light. . . . Theoretical freedom allows the transcendental philosopher to recognize that she is involved in a dynamic relation

whose form she dictates as a reflecting subject. . . . Transcendental discourse is not properly speaking transcendent in relation to experience; rather, it is essentially turned toward experience. It is transcendental insofar as it must obey the law that it itself introduces" (*Kant et ses épigones*, p. 109).

27. The demand that this necessity *ought necessarily to be possible a priori* for the philosopher who expresses it (in order to make sensible experience itself possible) evokes the categorical imperative. In Fichte, this requirement leads to an ultimate principle of the self-legitimization of transcendental discourse. Alexander Schnell, among others, has shown that the Fichtean principle is both categorical *and* hypothetical, which in his eyes entails the "collapse of necessity" in classical German philosophy, or at least the collapse of an absolutist view of necessity (see Alexander Schnell, *L'effondrement de la nécessité* [Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2015], p. 29; my trans.).
28. See Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, trans. and ed. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 93–4.
29. In Kant, at least, the principle of sufficient reason is absorbed by causality, understood as a strictly efficient cause and not as a final cause or *raison d'être*. The Second Analogy of Experience indicates this by placing the condition and the conditioned on the same level. The conditioned temporally succeeds the condition; neither one is situated beyond the field of appearances. In this way, as Céli Hirata has pointed out, "although Kant maintains the principle [of sufficient reason], he strips it of its teleological and transcendent meaning in order to restrict its application to spatio-temporal representations, thereby fundamentally changing the place and importance it enjoyed in Leibniz" ("Cause et conséquence: La reprise du principe de raison suffisante chez Kant," in *Kant et la science*, p. 320; my trans.).
30. The third postulate states the following: "That whose connection with the actual [*das Wirkliche*] is determined in accordance with general conditions of experience is (exists) necessarily" (KrV A218/B266; CPR 321). The necessity of what exists is not grounded in reason apodictically but only concerns the *relations* between phenomena, and thus, as Kant explains further on, in the Analogies of Experience: "Everything that happens [*Alles, was geschieht*] is hypothetically necessary" (KrV A228/B280; CPR 329; emphasis added), since something has to happen in the first place.
31. For a good example of this kind of commentary, see Jane Kneller, "The Power of Imaginative Freedom," chap. 2 of *Kant and the Power of Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 38–59.
32. Manfred Riedel, *Urteilkraft und Vernunft: Kants ursprüngliche Fragestellung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989).
33. All of this may recall Hans Vaihinger's famous *Die Philosophie des Als ob* (*The Philosophy of 'As if': A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind*, trans. C.K. Ogden [New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1935]), which gained some prominence at the turn of the twentieth century. However, while Vaihinger holds that the phenomenal

world is pre-formatted by our fictive schemas, he does not really settle the ambiguous status of the world in itself, namely whether it exists independently of phenomena and antecedently to our approximative models of it. This is obviously not my concern here. I have no need for naïve realism to serve as the counterpart of my emphasis on fictive schemas, which should not be understood as an approximation to an external “reality,” in any case. Moreover, Vaihinger centers his argument solely on the efficacy of fictive schemas in philosophy (theoretical or practical), the sciences, various cultures, and history—without reflecting on transcendentalism itself as a *specific* kind of fiction. By contrast, I am seeking to combine the problematicity of transcendental discourse with a demand for evidential demonstration, the importance of which Vaihinger does not recognize. Paradoxically, he ultimately fails to go beyond his pejorative reading of fictive schemas and of the imagination as a lack or deficit of reality, and as a result his entire project aims to legitimize the pejorative, so to speak. He avers that we will always require the “unreal” and its “empty” constructions in order to understand reality in itself (see, for example, p. 278).

34. Novalis, *Das philosophisch-theoretische Werk*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl, vol. 2 of *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel (Munich: Hanser, 2005), p. 640; my trans.
35. Ernst Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996), vol. 1, p. 187; my trans.
36. Utopia is itself presented by Bloch as “a philosophical category of our time,” which of course requires one to accept—as I do—a certain historicization of transcendental philosophy (see “Die Utopie ist eine philosophische Kategorie unseres Zeitalters: Gespräch mit Jean-Michel Palmier,” in *Tagträume vom aufrechten Gang: Sechs Interviews mit Ernst Bloch*, ed. Arno Münster [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977], pp. 121–6).
37. Friedrich Schlegel, “Propädeutik und Logik,” in *Philosophische Vorlesungen II (1800–1807)*, ed. Jean-Jacques Anstett, vol. 13 of *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler, Jean-Jacques Anstett, Hans Eichner, and Andreas Arndt (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1964), p. 267; all translations of this text are my own. The strongly Heideggerian overtones evoked by this thesis today should not obscure the fact that it was first intended as an immediate reaction to Kant, on the basis of an entirely different “historical *a priori*.”
38. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
39. Gaetano Ghiurazzi, “Schématisme et Modalité: La doctrine kantienne du schématisme comme thématization de la dimension analogico-expérimentale de la connaissance,” *Kant-Studien* 91:2 (2000), p. 148; my trans. Incidentally, Ghiurazzi himself alludes to Schlegel’s Cologne lectures (p. 147)—a rare occurrence in Kant scholarship.
40. Immanuel Kant, “Reflections on Anthropology [Refl. 158a–1481],” ed. Erich Adickes, in *Anthropologie*, ed. Erich Adickes, vol. 15 of *Handschriftlicher Nachlaß*, ed. Erich Adickes et al., vols. 14–23 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Prussian Academy of the Sciences (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1923), refl. 254, p.

- 95; my trans.
41. Claude Piché, "Les fictions de la raison pure," *Philosophiques* 13:2 (1986), pp. 291–303; all translations of this text are my own.
 42. *Ibid.*, p. 292–3.
 43. See Immanuel Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*, ed. Paul Menzer, in *Vorfrüchtige Schriften II (1757–1777)*, ed. Paul Gedan, Kurd Lasswitz, et al., vol. 2 of *Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Dilthey, vols. 1–9 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Prussian Academy of the Sciences (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1912), pp. 317–73; *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Illustrated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, trans. Emanuel Goerwitz, ed. Frank Sewall (New York: Macmillan, 1900).
 44. Novalis, *Das philosophisch-theoretische Werk*, p. 320; my trans. [The first two of the so-called *Logological Fragments* have been translated into English under that title in *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: SUNY, 1997), pp. 47–82—Ed.]
 45. In the sense of the "empty object" and/or "missing object," depending on one's point of view (see Henny Blomme, "L'être de l'ombre," in *Philosophie nach Kant: Neue Wege zum Verständnis von Kants Transzendental und Moralphilosophie*, ed. Mario Egger [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014], p. 119).
 46. The relative impasse of the Transcendental Dialectic is that it ends up oscillating between the logical possibility of the *ens rationis* and the logical impossibility of the *nihil negativum* (i.e., the self-contradictory concept) by relegating the *nihil privativum* to a real rather than strictly logical possibility. In the Amphiboly, and well before in his essay on negative magnitudes in 1763, the *nihil privativum* was a "reality" only deprived of an object because it had been neutralized by the equilibrium of two real opposing forces; the *nihil privativum*'s "unpresentability" constituted its "reality" (see Immanuel Kant, "Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy," in *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, trans. and ed. David Walford and Ralf Meerbote [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], pp. 203–42). What I mean to say is that any characterization of the category of "reality" within transcendental discourse comes after the fact, since it was first made possible by the free establishment of a transcendental fiction, which is not a thing but has status as a "nothing" and has a "real" existence.
 47. Thus, I have not eliminated skepticism, which cannot be fought on the terrain of arguments, as Fichte would later show, but on the terrain of pragmatic action (see, for example, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797–1800)*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994], pp. 7–35). Yet I have "made a pact" with it, just as Faust, along with all of classical German philosophy, made a pact with Mephistopheles and his negativity. This implies that in wagering on its own possibility, transcendentalism fundamentally rests on an act of belief (*Glaube*), as Jacobi had clearly seen (see Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, "Open Letter to Fichte, 1799," trans. Diana Behler, in *Philosophy of German Idealism: Fichte, Jacobi, Schelling*, ed. Ernst Behler [New York: Continuum, 2003], pp. 119–41, esp. 121). But

whereas Jacobi rejects transcendentalism, Fichte will reply by fully accepting and integrating the fundamental dimension of belief—properly understood as the very business of transcendental philosophy. The important §9 of the *Grundlage* of 1794 already bears witness to this position: “As to reality [*Realität*] in general, whether that of the self or the not-self, there is only a *belief*” (Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, trans. and ed. Peter Heath and John Lachs [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982], p. 264; “Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre 1794,” in *Zur theoretischen Philosophie*, vol. 1 of *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Immanuel Hermann von Fichte [Berlin: Veit, 1845], p. 301). Transcendental philosophy itself springs from a belief—and Jacobi himself refuses to believe it! In the final analysis, the Kant I have presented in these pages remains very “modern”: he is the son of Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*, for which method is the path, the very act of walking along it. There is no definition that could mark out the path in advance so that we could then progress along it with our eyes closed, using logical arguments alone, since one must first wander in order to know what one wants (to say). Reflecting on transcendental language *ipso facto* involves putting language to work and continually revising the very presentation of the transcendental aim. The presentation itself is always “problematic” and resists any uniform codification. Kant was brilliant enough to make us sometimes forget all the implications of his act in spite of its audacity; with his scholastic style he deftly juggles definitions, concepts, and propositions to make his points. And yet, because it was sought after by the very project of a tribunal, freedom ends up being the surprise element of Kant’s first *Critique*. To be sure, it receives a doctrinal outline in the second *Critique*, an outline already foreshadowed in the first; yet in a far more fundamental sense, the *Critique of Pure Reason* already “pre-forms” freedom as a problem, lodging it in the very heart of the critical approach. Even when “Kantian freedom” is reduced to an argument-type, whether moral or epistemological, it still flows from the freedom to *write a Critique*, which the body of the text does not always know how to handle since it had not foreseen the effects of the free decision to conceive of philosophy as a tribunal, much less one that is in principle incorruptible and impervious to any censure. Many definitions of this freedom will be formulated further on down the path; these have been expertly compared and assessed among others by Paul Guyer in his *Kant’s System of Nature and Freedom: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. pp. 125–32. It was nonetheless necessary here to begin by wandering, to dare to use this freedom, which is at first defined neither as *Freiheit* nor as *Selbstständigkeit*, thus opening up a gulf that the Idealists and Romantics later make the center of their projects. This, no doubt, is what it means to imagine oneself as a modern.