

# Can Metaphysics Become a Science for Kant?

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in: R. Dunphy, T. Lovat (eds.), *Metaphysics as a Science in Classical German Philosophy*, Routledge 2023

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## Abstract

In this chapter, I investigate a problem for Kant's claim that metaphysics can reach the status of science. The problem arises when one considers Kant's account of the "architectonic unity" of metaphysics in the Architectonic of Pure Reason. Attaining architectonic unity is a condition for becoming a science for *any* body of cognitions that purports to be such. This is achieved when the cognitions belonging to a science are systematically organized according to the "idea of reason" which lies at the basis of that science. However, Kant suggests that nobody can ever legitimately claim to have matched the idea of the philosopher, where this appears to imply that nobody can justifiably claim that she has fully grasped the idea of metaphysics. This generates a problem. I suggest that when Kant claims that the idea of the philosopher must remain an *ideal* or an *archetype*, he has a particular conception of philosophy in mind, that is, philosophy as a doctrine of wisdom. According to this understanding, philosophy must provide an example of how one can become virtuous. However, this is only a partial solution to our problem, for reasons that will be illustrated.

## 1. Introduction

Famously, Kant presents the main question of the *Critique of Pure Reason* by saying that it intends to determine whether metaphysics can become a science (Bxv-xvi; B21-2).<sup>1</sup> He answers *positively* to this question. He writes that the "experiment" carried out in the text "promises to metaphysics the secure course of a science in its first part, where it concerns itself with concepts *a priori* to which the corresponding

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<sup>1</sup> I refer to Kant 1781 and Kant 1787 with A and B respectively, and to Kant 1900– by indicating volume and page numbers. Translations are from Kant 1992–.

objects appropriate to them can be given in experience” (Bxviii-xix). Therefore, the *Critique* establishes that metaphysics *can* become a science as far as it collects a priori cognitions regarding objects of possible experience. It is quite otherwise for its *presumed* capacity to obtain cognitions regarding unconditioned objects. In this respect, “there emerges a very strange result, and one that appears very disadvantageous to the whole purpose with which the second part of metaphysics concerns itself, namely that with this faculty we can never get beyond the boundaries of possible experience, which is nevertheless precisely the most essential occupation of this science” (Bxix). The “strange” result is that we cannot obtain “theoretical” cognition of those very objects that seems the most important for metaphysics, like God and immortality.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Kant clearly states that metaphysics *can* become a science, although in a more modest fashion than we had initially in view.<sup>3</sup>

Since Kant is explicit on this issue, my question in this chapter does not concern whether Kant *claimed* that metaphysics could become a science. Rather, the question arises because even though Kant asserts this possibility, he provides an account of what philosophers can legitimately claim regarding their attempts to realize metaphysical systems, where this account seems to imply that metaphysics cannot attain one of the conditions of science that Kant himself sets. The condition that I

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<sup>2</sup> However, Kant hints at the possibility to find a place within metaphysics for a commitment towards those objects from a “practical” perspective. “[W]hat still remains for us is to try whether there are not data in reason’s practical data for determining that transcendent rational concept of the unconditioned, in such a way as to reach beyond the boundaries of all possible experience, in accordance with the wishes of metaphysics, cognitions a priori that are possible, but only from a practical standpoint” (Bxxi).

<sup>3</sup> In his contribution to this volume, “Two Models of Critique of Metaphysics: Kant and Hegel” (see [Ch. ???](#)), Dietmar Heidemann argues that Kant believes that metaphysics cannot become a science. Of course, the disagreement between our views could be mainly terminological. For example, if, with the term “metaphysics,” one specifically understands a discipline that describes supersensible or “unconditioned” objects, it is clear that Kant believes that we cannot have cognitions regarding those objects, which appears to imply that they cannot constitute a science. However, Heidemann’s characterization of metaphysics is broader. He takes his claim that, for Kant, metaphysics cannot become a science to apply to both general and special metaphysics. In his view, they both attempt to develop cognition from “concepts” alone, but this is impossible, since we also need intuition to obtain cognition. I agree that one criticism that Kant moves against *traditional* metaphysics is that it proceeds by concepts alone and so cannot establish synthetic claims (a version of this reading has been defended by Lanier Anderson (2015)). However, this does not rule out that metaphysics can become a science when it adopts a new self-understanding, for example one in which, in order to provide a priori cognition of nature (just to focus on the theoretical side), we need to identify both a priori concepts and corresponding rules that a priori determine the synthesis of intuition. The result would be a metaphysics that is more modest (it could not comprise cognition of objects that cannot be given in sensible intuition), but not necessarily one for which it would be impossible to become a science.

have in mind is what Kant calls “architectonic unity.”<sup>4</sup> Kant claims that a body of cognitions needs to enjoy this kind of unity in order to become a science. Having architectonic unity does not simply mean to organize cognitions systematically, though. In addition to this, the cognitions in questions must be organized according to one “idea” given a priori by reason. Therefore, in order to be able to claim that a body of cognitions can become a science, it seems that we should at least be in the position to claim that we can grasp the idea of a science and that we can organize its body of cognitions according to that idea. The problem is that Kant seems to maintain that no philosopher can ever legitimately claim to have grasped the idea of metaphysics. This is suggested by his contention that nobody can claim to have matched the idea of the philosopher. But this generates a problem for Kant’s claim that metaphysics can become a science.

I will start in Section 2 by having a closer look at the problem I have just sketched. In Section 3, I will propose a first attempt at a solution, one that builds on the claim that it is indeed possible to grasp the idea of metaphysics, even though nobody can ever be sure that they have done that. This claim captures a line of thought that is present in the Architectonic of Pure Reason. However, I do not think it identifies the main reason why Kant states that no philosopher can legitimately claim to have matched the idea of the philosopher. In Section 4, I submit that we can make sense of the latter contention by distinguishing between two ways of understanding the tasks of philosophy, one according to which philosophy is simply a system of “philosophical” cognitions that collects both “theoretical” and “practical” cognitions. In this picture, metaphysics is the part of philosophy that comprises philosophical cognitions that are a priori. By contrast, according to a second understanding, philosophy must provide practical guidance regarding how we can attain virtue. To illustrate this distinction, I will focus on three further distinctions: that between the “school concept” and the “worldly concept” of philosophy, that between philosophy as a doctrine of skills and philosophy as a doctrine of wisdom, and that between the “philodox” and the “misologist.” Finally, in Section 5, I will suggest that framing Kant’s demand of modesty toward philosophers from the perspective of these distinctions provides a

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<sup>4</sup> On architectonic unity in Kant see: La Rocca 2003: Ch. 6; Manchester 2003; Manchester 2008; Sturm 2009: Ch. 3; Sturm 2020; Ypi 2011; Ypi 2021; Gava 2014; Gava forthcoming: Ch. 1; Ferrarin 2015: Ch. 1.

new meaning to the problem from which we started. However, it is not clear whether Kant has a solution for the problem even when it is construed in this way.

## 2. Architectonic unity and the demand of modesty

Famously, in the Architectonic of Pure Reason Kant submits that systematicity is a condition of science. Accordingly, he writes that “systematic unity is that which first makes ordinary cognition into science” (A832/B860). He further distinguishes between “technical” and “architectonic” unity. The former arises empirically, “in accordance with aims occurring contingently.” The latter arises “from the chief end of reason,” where this end is an idea given a priori by reason (A833/B861). It is only architectonic unity that can provide the status of science to a body of cognitions: “What we call science [...] cannot arise technically, [...] but arises architectonically” (A833/B861). Therefore, while technical unity is a form of systematic unity, it is insufficient to attain the status of science because the principle according to which it organizes cognitions is contingent and arbitrary. By contrast, architectonic unity is achieved when we not only organize cognitions systematically but also adopt a principle of organization that has its seat a priori in reason.<sup>5</sup>

These claims are puzzling in many ways. For starters, it is not clear what the *content* of the idea that gives unity to a science should be.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Kant does not provide any justification for the contention that reason admits only *one* ordering of cognitions as non arbitrary. I will not discuss these difficulties here.<sup>7</sup> What is important for my purposes is that Kant appears to be committed to the following theses:

- (1) There is *one* correct ordering of the cognitions belonging to a science;

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<sup>5</sup> I elaborate further on the claim that architectonic unity cannot simply be systematicity in Gava forthcoming: Ch. 1. An implication of this claim is that we must separate Kant’s discussion of reason’s contribution to the systematicity of empirical cognition in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic from his analysis of architectonic unity in the Doctrine of Method. Interpreters that see a stronger connection between these two discussions are, for example, Sturm 2009: Ch. 3 and Ypi 2021. It might seem odd to claim that the principle of organization of the cognitions belonging to a science has its seat a priori in reason. However, the sciences that Kant discusses in the Architectonic chapter comprise a priori cognitions. When we take this fact into consideration, it seems plausible to maintain that the principle according to which these cognitions are to be organized should also be accessible a priori, where this does not mean that it is immediately transparent to us (see Gava 2016; Gava forthcoming: Ch. 1).

<sup>6</sup> In Gava forthcoming: Ch. 1, I claim that the idea of a science is a correct description of the body of cognitions that form a science and its parts-whole relationships.

<sup>7</sup> See Gava forthcoming: Ch. 1.

- (2) In order to be considered a science, the body of cognitions belonging to a science must be organized according to its correct ordering;
- (3) We can have a priori access to the idea of reason that prescribes this ordering;
- (4) We can organize the cognitions belonging to a science according to their correct ordering, so that they can become a science.<sup>8</sup>

Now, these claims have the following consequences for the “scientists” that attempt to establish a science:

- (a) A scientist can grasp the idea prescribing the ordering of the cognitions of a science;
- (b) A scientist can organize the cognitions of a science according to that idea.

Therefore, because “philosophers” are the “scientists” that attempts to establish metaphysics as a science, when we claim that metaphysics can become a science, it appears that Kant must accept the following contentions:

- (a’) A philosopher can grasp the idea prescribing the ordering of the cognitions of metaphysics;
- (b’) A philosopher can organize the cognitions of metaphysics according to that idea.

However, some passages in the Architectonic conflict with both (a’) and (b’), so that it seems that a condition for metaphysics to become a science cannot be met. In a first passage, Kant links the idea of philosophy to an “archetype” (*Urbild*) that constitutes the standard according to which the correctness of our *attempts* to build philosophical systems should be judged:

Now the system of all philosophical cognition is **philosophy**. One must take this objectively if one understands by it the archetype for the assessment of all attempts to philosophize, which should serve to assess each subjective philosophy [...]. In this way philosophy is a

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<sup>8</sup> Since architectonic unity is required for science and since it is achieved when a body of cognitions is organized according to its proper idea, it seems that the ideas that are at stake in architectonic unity are realizable, otherwise Kant could not consider some existing disciplines as proper sciences. For a different reading that stresses that ideas must remain a *focus imaginarius*, see Strum 2009: 168.

mere idea of a possible science, which is nowhere given *in concreto*, but which one seeks to approach in various ways until the only footpath, much overgrown by sensibility, is discovered, and the hitherto unsuccessful ectype, so far as it has been granted to humans, is made equal to the archetype. (A838/B866)

The passage focuses on philosophy, whereas we have so far directed our attention towards metaphysics. However, since metaphysics is a part of philosophy (A840-1/B868-9), what applies to philosophy in general should apply to metaphysics in particular, too. Notice two things about the passage. First, in a way similar to any idea of a science, the archetype of philosophy provides a standard of correctness for assessing concretely existing philosophical systems. Second, Kant does not rule out that existing philosophical systems can realize the archetype. He writes that no presently existing system has matched the archetype yet, but he leaves open the possibility that this might be possible in the future. If we apply this thought to metaphysics and its relationship to its idea, this means that it is possible that we get to a point where the cognitions belonging to it are ordered according to the idea that prescribes their correct ordering. So, no problem for Kant's claim that metaphysics can become a science here.

However, a few lines later, Kant uses again the concept of the archetype in relation to the idea of philosophy, but this time he links it to a particular understanding of the figure of the philosopher, characterized as "the legislator [*Gesetzgeber*] of human reason" (A839/B867). In this context, he submits that "[i]t would be very boastful to call oneself a philosopher in this sense and to pretend to have equaled the archetype, which lies only in the idea" (A839/B867). Here, Kant submits not only that it would be pretentious to claim to have realized the archetype of the philosopher, but also that that archetype must remain an idea. We find similar contentions in student notes from Kant's lectures. For example, in the *Lectures on Philosophical Encyclopedia*, Kant states: "An archetype remains an archetype no more if it can be reached. It should serve merely as a guide [*Richtschnuur*]. The philosopher is only an idea" (29:8).

Understanding what it means that the idea of the philosopher must remain an archetype will be a central aim of this chapter. For now, it is sufficient to see why this claim can generate a problem for Kant's contention that metaphysics can become a

science. The claim might be taken as a request of modesty directed toward any philosopher: that is, no philosopher can legitimately maintain that she has said the last word regarding philosophy; she cannot legitimately maintain that she has grasped and realized the ultimate philosophical system. In one sense, the claim might only concern what a philosopher can *maintain*. Leaving aside the question whether she can *in fact* realize the ultimate system of philosophy, the claim would submit that she cannot *maintain* that she has done it. But even if we understand the claim in this modest form, it seems that it causes problems for Kant's contention that metaphysics can become a science. For if nobody can ever say that she has realized philosophy as a science, where this, of course, applies to metaphysics as a part of philosophy, too, in which sense can we say that metaphysics *can* become a science? However, since Kant submits that the idea of the philosopher must *remain* an idea, the claim can be taken more strongly, as implying not only that no philosopher can legitimately *maintain* that she has realized the ultimate system of philosophy, but also that she cannot *actually* realize it.

### **3. Reason's lack of self-transparency**

One first way to solve the problem is to embrace the first way of understanding Kant's request of modesty and try to make plausible the idea that metaphysics can indeed become a science even though nobody can legitimately claim that one has realized metaphysics as a science. Maintaining that metaphysics can become a science on this basis means maintaining, on the one hand, that an individual philosopher is perfectly capable of realizing metaphysics as a science and, on the other, that she cannot however legitimately claim that she has done that, even when she did. But how could we justify this contention?

I believe that it can be justified when we focus on reason's lack of self-transparency.<sup>9</sup> We know that metaphysics collects a priori cognitions of reason. Clearly, we are capable to this kind of cognitions. However, given Kant's account of reason, it is also clear that we do not have an immediate and transparent grasp of the rational cognitions that are in our reach. Take Kant's account of transcendental illusion. According to it, our reason has a natural tendency to make claims it is not justified in

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<sup>9</sup> On this point, see also Gava 2016.

making, where this leads us to believe that we are able to attain rational cognitions that in fact are impossible for beings with the cognitive capacities that we happen to have. The claim that reason has not a clear grasp of the cognitions that are in its reach does not only apply to reason in the narrow sense and its contentions concerning the unconditioned. Rather, something similar can be said regarding *valid* rational cognitions that concerns objects of possible experience. If we take the a priori principle of causality, this is clearly a valid a priori cognition of reason (understood in the broad sense as the faculty of a priori cognitions). However, it is not the case that we have a clear and immediate grasp of the nature and limits of this cognition. Rather, we have a natural tendency to take the principle as applying to things in themselves. As a consequence of this, we misrepresent the conditions of its valid application.

Given reason's lack of self-transparency, it is possible to make sense of the idea that an individual philosopher is perfectly capable of realizing metaphysics as a science while she cannot legitimately *claim* that she has done that. She can realize metaphysics as a science because metaphysics comprises rational cognitions that are in her power. She cannot ever legitimately claim that she has realized metaphysics as a science because, given reason's lack of self-transparency, she cannot ever be completely sure that the system of cognitions she is proposing matches the correct system of metaphysical cognitions.<sup>10</sup>

#### **4. The unrealizability of the idea of the philosopher**

Even though I believe that it is correct, on Kantian grounds, to advance a request of modesty toward philosophers along the lines I just sketched, I do not think that this is what Kant has in mind when he says that the idea of the philosopher is unrealizable. In my view, it is no coincidence that Kant's claim concerns the unrealizability of the idea of the *philosopher* and not *philosophy*. Moreover, both in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and in the passage from the *Lectures on Philosophical Encyclopedia* that we quoted, Kant speaks of the idea of the philosopher only after having introduced the

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<sup>10</sup> One problem for this line of reasoning is that Kant sometimes claims that certainty is a condition for rational cognition (see A822-3/B850-1), where this seems to imply that a philosopher, in order to realize metaphysics as a science, should know that she knows. Since, in this paper, I will argue that Kant's claims regarding the the unrealizability of the idea of the philosopher do not mainly rest on reason's lack of self-transparency, I will not deal with this issue. For an attempt to depict Kant's requirement of certainty in fallibilist terms, see Chignell 2021.

distinction between the “school” concept and the “worldly” concept of philosophy. These clues point to a different understanding of the claim, according to which the latter means that no philosopher can ever become an example of perfect morality. To show this, I will begin by focusing on three relevant distinctions, that between the school concept (*Schulbegriff*) and the worldly concept (*Weltbegriff*) of philosophy, that between philosophy as a doctrine of skills and philosophy as a doctrine of wisdom, and that between the “philodox” and the “misologist.”

a. *The school concept and the worldly concept of philosophy.* In both the *Critique of Pure Reason* and various lectures notes, Kant links the unrealizable archetype of the philosopher to the idea of the philosopher as a legislator (*Gesetzgeber*) of human reason (see A839/B867; 9:24; 29:7-8). This is contrasted with the idea of the philosopher as an “artist of reason” (*Vernunftskünstler*) (9:24; 29:7-8). What is distinctive of the former is that it takes into consideration the supreme ends of human reason (29:8). This is also what characterizes what Kant calls the worldly concept of philosophy. While according to its school concept philosophy is a “system of cognition that is sought only as a science without having as its end anything more than the systematic unity of this knowledge” (A838/B866), according to its worldly concept, “philosophy is the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason” (A839/B867). It is no wonder that it is exactly this second concept of philosophy that is often “personified and represented as an archetype in the ideal of the **philosopher**” (A838-9/B866-7). Kant explicitly stresses that the philosopher as a legislator of human reason pursues the worldly concept of philosophy (A839/B867).

Kant does not clarify what the essential or supreme ends of reason are, but he submits that there is only one final end at the top of them (A840/B868). According to a student note, the final end in question is the highest good (29:948). This identification is consistent with the general outlook of Kant’s system. Kant explicitly links the final end of philosophy according to its worldly concept to morality (A840/B868) and it is plausible to consider the highest good the chief end of reason from the perspective of Kant’s moral philosophy. As is well known, the concept of the highest good postulates a proportionality between moral worth and happiness. Therefore, it seems that both philosophy according to its worldly concept and the idea of the philosopher as a legislator of human reason give centre stage to the thought of this proportionality.

What is still not clear is why Kant stresses that the concept of philosophy according to its worldly concept is often personified in the idea of the philosopher.

b. *Philosophy as a doctrine of skills and philosophy as a doctrine of wisdom.* Kant often links the worldly concept of philosophy to the idea of philosophy as a “doctrine of wisdom” and the school concept of philosophy to the idea of philosophy as a “doctrine of skills.” The idea behind this distinction is that insofar as philosophy according to its school concept does not take into consideration which ends we should pursue, the cognitions it collects are made available for a multiplicity of ends. In this sense, the philosopher “gives rules for the use of reason for any sort of end one wishes” (9:24). By contrast, philosophy as a doctrine of wisdom provides guidance regarding how we can attain our most fundamental ends and, among these, the highest good in particular.

But how can a doctrine of wisdom show us how we can pursue the highest good? To answer this question, we must first keep in mind that of the two elements composing the highest good, virtue and happiness, it is only the former that is in our control. Happiness is only something we can hope for once we have made ourselves worthy of it. Because a doctrine of wisdom can only guide us toward the highest good for the part of it that is in our power, it seems that it should first of all show us how we can become virtuous.

This clarifies why philosophy, when understood according to its worldly concept and as a doctrine of wisdom, is often personified in the figure of the philosopher. For Kant believes that it is only by being an *example* of morality that we can really teach anybody how to become virtuous. In the *Jäsche Logic*, he writes that a “teacher of wisdom” delivers his teachings “through doctrine and *example* [my emphasis]” (9:24). In the *Vienna Logic*, we find a characterization of the figure of the philosopher which also emphasizes its capacity to be an example of morality: “[t]he cause of the fact that we esteem highly someone who arranges his actions according to the strictest laws of morality, and who never departs from the straight path, is perhaps that morals is in fact always the end toward which all speculations tend. Morals constitutes a unity of all cognition of reason, and only he who follows its rules can be called a philosopher” (24:798-9).

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant explicitly links the contention that no philosopher can legitimately claim to have attained the archetype to the need to be an example of perfect morality: “[...] philosophy, as well as wisdom, would itself always remain an ideal, whereas subjectively, for a person, it is only the goal of his unceasing endeavours; and no one would be justified in professing to be in possession of it, so as to assume the name of philosopher, unless he could also show its infallible effect in his own person as an example (in mastery of himself and the unquestioned interest that he preeminently takes in the general good), which the ancients also required for deserving that honorable title” (5:108-9).

At this point, one might ask why a philosopher as a teacher of wisdom must provide both a “doctrine” and an “example.” Why is it not sufficient that she provides a principle to determine what is the right thing to do in a particular situation? After all, Kant’s practical philosophy does exactly that. It delivers a principle that enables us to check whether the maxims that guide our actions are morally acceptable. Clearly, Kant’s categorical imperative is able to determine what is morally right and morally wrong. However, we are not perfectly rational beings and often, even though we recognize what is morally prescribed in a particular case, we fail to act accordingly. Given this aspect of our nature, guidance regarding how to be perfectly virtuous should not only determine what is morally right in each particular situation. It must also show us how we can bring ourselves and our partly sensible nature to infallibly comply with the principle of morality.<sup>11</sup> But this cannot be done by providing an additional set of rules. Rather, it can only be done by providing an example of how attaining perfect morality has been possible for a particular person.

This account of the philosopher as a teacher of wisdom provides a completely new meaning to the claim that idea of the philosopher is unrealizable. The latter claim does not mean that no particular philosopher can ever realize – or claim to have realized –

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<sup>11</sup> Notice that this is totally different from identifying extra-moral incentives to be moral, as Kant’s position in the Canon of the first *Critique* sometimes seems to do (see A811/B39; A812/B840). Rather, the relevant incentive is moral through and through. The doctrine of wisdom simply provides an example of how we can infallibly follow that incentive.

the ultimate system of philosophy. Rather, it means that no particular philosopher can ever be – or claim to be – an example of perfect morality for other human beings.

c. *The philodox and the misologist.* One issue that we have not considered yet is how the two understanding of philosophy that we have analyzed so far are related to one another. How does philosophy according to the school concept and philosophy according to the worldly concept relate to one another? Some passages suggest that Kant regarded these two senses of philosophy as reciprocally dependent on each other.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, he calls philodox the philosopher who is only concerned with erecting a system of philosophical cognitions and does not consider essential ends of reason. “The artist of reason, or the *philodox*, as Socrates calls him, strives only for speculative knowledge, without looking to see how much the knowledge contributes to the final end of human reason” (9:24).<sup>13</sup> By contrast, the misologist is the philosopher who only cares about wisdom and is not interested in building a system of philosophical cognitions as a science. “He who has hatred toward all the sciences, and who pretends that wisdom alone is to be esteemed, is called a misologist” (24:800; see also 9:26). Therefore, the misologist is characterized by *giving up* any attempt to build philosophy as a science, as a system of valid cognitions of reason, while she only focuses on providing practical guidance on how to attain virtue and the highest good.

Both philodoxes and misologists are mistaken in their endeavors. The former are mistaken in thinking that philosophy can do without considering essential ends of reason. These ends are simply fundamental from the perspective of our human nature and philosophy is the only discipline that can take them into account. The latter are

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<sup>12</sup> I believe it is more correct to say that the worldly concept of philosophy incorporates what is correct within the school concept, that is, the search for systematic cognition. I here pursue this different way of understanding their relationship because it appears to provide a path to solve our problem, one according to which attaining the status of science is only a question for the school concept of philosophy.

<sup>13</sup> One might here wonder whether the school concept of philosophy is inherently philodoxical. After all, if the philosopher following this concept is interested in the systematicity of philosophical cognitions, and if construing philosophy in relation to the essential ends of reason is the only way to attain this systematicity, the school concept would naturally develop into the worldly concept. This seems correct, but Kant seems to characterize the school concept both for what it does (furthering systematicity) and for what it does not (considering essential ends). In this sense, the concept of philosophy we attain at the end cannot be described as a school concept, even though it incorporates some of its features.

mistaken in thinking that wisdom can be attained without science. On the one hand, this means that trying to provide practical guidance on how to attain virtue or the highest good without first determining what these are is hopeless. On the other, if we have to provide guidance toward attaining those goals, it is important that we first figure out whether and how they are possible.

### **5. Metaphysics as a science and philosophy as a doctrine of wisdom**

In the last Section, I have suggested that Kant's claim that the idea of the philosopher is unrealizable must not be read as we first imagined. The claim means that no particular philosopher can ever be – or claim to be – an example of perfect morality for other human beings. What consequences does this have for the problem from which we started? Does it mean that, after all, the claim does not generate particular difficulties for Kant's contention that metaphysics can become a science? Indeed, Kant's distinction between philosophy according to its school concept and philosophy according to its worldly concept might be read as confirming that the problem disappears. For one might argue that whether metaphysics can become a science is a problem that only concerns philosophy according to its school concept. Metaphysics as a science, as a part of philosophy as a science, must provide a system of a priori cognitions of reason, where, one might continue, this system does not need to include a doctrine of wisdom, understood as a discipline providing practical guidance on how to become virtuous.

This approach finds confirmation in Kant's account of the misologist of reason. As we have just seen, the misologist only seeks wisdom and ignore the pursuit of science, which suggests that "science" and "wisdom" are sharply separated. True, Kant contends that both the philodox and the misologist are wrong in thinking that they can pursue either science or wisdom in separation from one another. But this does not necessarily imply that in order to attain metaphysics as a science we must also perfectly embody the idea of the philosopher as a teacher of wisdom. Therefore, from the fact that nobody can ever become – or claim to have become – a teacher of wisdom, it does not follow that we cannot attain metaphysics as a science.

The solution to our problem is not so simple, though. In fact, what the new understanding of the claim regarding the unrealizability of the idea of the philosopher

provides is a new way of picturing the problem from which we started. This new version of the problem arises because Kant appears to think that philosophy can only attain the status of science when it is construed according to its worldly concept.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, in a footnote in the Architectonic chapter, Kant writes: “A worldly concept here means one that concerns that which necessarily interests everyone. I determine the aim of a science in accordance with school concepts if it is regarded only as one of the skills for certain arbitrary ends” (A839/B867n). As we have seen in Section 2, it is technical unity that is achieved in relation to arbitrary ends. By contrast, architectonic unity is achieved in relation to reason’s supreme ends and ideas, where these provide a principle of organization that is not arbitrary. Since, as we saw, architectonic unity is necessary for science and philosophy according to its school concept can at best achieve technical unity,<sup>15</sup> it follows that philosophy according to its school concept cannot become a science.

This has at least two consequences for how we should address the problem of this paper. First, we cannot stress that whether metaphysics can become a science is a problem that only concerns philosophy according to its school concept. So it seems that the solution that we sketched at the beginning of this section is not an option. Second, since philosophy according to its worldly concept is often personified in the figure of the philosopher as a “legislator of human reason” and a “teacher of wisdom,” and since it is according to this concept that philosophy can attain architectonic unity, it seems that the question of whether this idea of the philosopher can be realized is indeed relevant for the determining whether philosophy can become a science.

At this point, one might point out that even though Kant believes that it is only according to its worldly concept that philosophy can become a science, this does not

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<sup>14</sup> I provide a full defense of this claim in Gava 2014 and Gava forthcoming: Ch. 1.

<sup>15</sup> In Gava forthcoming: Ch. 1, I argue that philosophy according to its school concept cannot in fact achieve any kind of unity because it cannot achieve coherence. For the point that I am making here, it is sufficient to show that philosophy according to its school concept can *at best* achieve technical unity. Still, my position is different from that of Tonelli (1994: 272) and Ypi (2011: 144), who maintain that philosophy according to the school concept *does* have technical unity. La Rocca (2003: 221) and Ferrarin (2015: 81) have still different views. La Rocca claims that philosophy according to its school concept has architectonic unity, while Ferrarin contends that it has a unity that is neither technical nor architectonic.

necessarily apply to metaphysics, as a part of philosophy. Kant might contend that while it is possible for metaphysics to become a science even without considering essential ends of reason and how to attain them, this issue is only central for philosophy as a whole. I do not think that this suggestion works, for at least two reasons. First, Kant's discussion in the Architectonic is clearly focused on a priori cognitions of reason, which belongs to metaphysics. Second, the idea of the highest good and the question regarding whether we can attain it play an important role within metaphysics for Kant.

If this is right, it seems that Kant's idea of metaphysics as a science is paradoxical.<sup>16</sup> On the one hand, he tells us that metaphysics can only achieve the status of science when it is construed according to a particular understanding of philosophy, one according to which philosophy should provide guidance regarding how we can achieve virtue and the highest good. On the other, given some characteristics of that same understanding, namely, that it requires that somebody becomes an example of perfect morality, where this is impossible, it seems that metaphysics cannot ever be completely realized.

Now that we have presented the problem in its new form, let me sketch a tentative solution to it. A possible way to solve the paradox might lie in distinguishing two different ways in which we can consider the highest good as a fundamental end of reason. In a first sense, saying that metaphysics must consider the highest good as the final end of reason might simply mean that it must take into account that it is in the nature of human beings to have this final end. A consequence of having this end is that we have a particular interest in the truth of some propositions that have always had a central place within metaphysics, like those asserting that God exists and the soul is immortal. Being conscious that we have this interest and that it could bring us to making unjustified contentions in metaphysics can be a means to avoid those contentions, which is in turn instrumental to achieving the status of science. More generally, taking into account that it is in the nature of human beings to have the

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<sup>16</sup> A hint toward this paradoxical nature is also given by the fact that while Kant describes philosophy according to its worldly concept as an idea of philosophy as a science, in his description of the misologist and the philodox, he regards philosophy as a science and philosophy as a doctrine of wisdom as different but complementary.

highest good as a final end could mean to explicitly consider whether it is achievable and whether it conflicts with theoretical cognitions we have.

In a second sense, saying that philosophy must take into consideration the highest good as our supreme end might instead mean that it should provide guidance regarding how this end can be concretely achieved. It is according to this second sense that philosophy must show, through the example of the philosopher, how one can achieve perfect morality in one's actions.

When we distinguish between these two ways of taking the highest good into consideration, we can accept the claim that metaphysics can only become a science according to its worldly concept without implying that this requires that a philosopher must be able to become an example of perfect morality. Rather, saying that metaphysics should be construed according to its worldly concept would only mean that it must take into account that it is in the nature of human beings to have the highest good as a final end. By contrast, trying to approach the archetype of the philosopher in our actions would be what we should do when we pursue philosophy as a doctrine of wisdom.<sup>17</sup>

## **6. Conclusion**

In this paper, I started from a problem that appeared to threaten Kant's contention that metaphysics can become a science. The problem arises because Kant's account of science requires that the cognitions belonging to a science are ordered according to an idea of reason that prescribes their correct ordering. However, Kant submits that the idea of the philosopher is unrealizable, where this can be taken as maintaining that nobody can ever grasp and realize the correct idea of philosophy and metaphysics (as a part of philosophy).

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<sup>17</sup> Notice that this attempted solution squares well with the two ways in which Kant describes philosophy as an archetype in the Architectonic. As we saw in Section 2, Kant equates the archetype of philosophy, first, to the "idea of a possible science" (A838/B866) and, second, to the figure of the philosopher as "the legislator of human reason" (A839/B867). While the first understanding of the archetype would require considering the highest good from the perspective of metaphysics as a science, the second sense points toward philosophy as a doctrine of wisdom.

I have suggested that this is not the correct way of understanding Kant's contention that the idea of the philosopher is unrealizable. The claim should be understood from the perspective of the worldly concept of philosophy and philosophy as a doctrine of wisdom. From this point of view, the claim means that nobody can ever become – or claim to have become – an example of perfect morality. However, this new understanding of Kant's claim does not provide a solution to our problem. It only put the problem in a different way. This is the case because Kant claims that it is only according to the worldly concept that philosophy (and metaphysics) can become a science. Therefore, it seems that Kant's conception of metaphysics as a science is paradoxical. On the one hand, he tells us that metaphysics can only achieve the status of science when it is construed according to a particular understanding of philosophy. On the other, given some characteristics of that same understanding, it seems that metaphysics cannot ever be completely realized.

I have sketched a tentative solution to the problem, when it is understood in this latter form, one that rests on a distinction between two ways in which metaphysics and philosophy can consider the highest good as a fundamental end of reason. Whether this solution is successful or not, one advantage of understanding Kant's claim that the idea of the philosopher is unrealizable along the lines I have suggested is that it allows us to draw a strong link between Kant's Transcendental Doctrine of Method in the first *Critique* and Kant's "practical" doctrines of method in the second *Critique* and the *Doctrine of Virtue*.<sup>18</sup> In the second *Critique*, Kant sharply separates their approaches. He writes:

The *doctrine of the method* of pure *practical* reason cannot be understood as the way to proceed (in reflection as well as in exposition) with pure practical principles with a view to scientific cognition of them, which alone is properly called method elsewhere, in the *theoretical* (for popular cognition needs a *manner* but science a *method*, i.e., a procedure *in accordance with principles* of reason by which alone the manifold of a cognition can become a *system*). Here the doctrine of method is understood, instead, as the way in which one can provide the laws of pure practical reason with *access* to the human mind and *influence* on its maxims, that is, the way in which one can make objectively practical reason *subjectively* practical as well." (5:151)

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<sup>18</sup> On practical Doctrines of Method see Bacin 2002; Bacin 2010.

The question regarding how metaphysics can become a science in accordance with principles of reason is clearly a central issue in the passages of the Architectonic that we have analyzed. By contrast, the question regarding how we can make objective practical reason *subjectively* practical is very close to our characterization of philosophy as a doctrine of wisdom. If it is true that, as we have suggested, the idea of the highest good is central to both these questions, even though from different but complementary perspectives, “theoretical” and “practical” doctrines of method might not be as far apart as Kant suggests.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> I thank the participants to the conference “Metaphysics as a Science in Classical German Philosophy” (16-17 July, 2021, over Zoom) and the editors of this volume for useful feedback on earlier drafts of this chapter.

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